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30 GREATEST EVER POWER-UPS

CLASSIC DEVELOPERS REVEAL THEIR ALL-TIME FAVOURITES + EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS ON THE CREATION OF POWER-UPS





IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

MEGA DRIVE
THE ESSENTIAL PERIPHERALS AND GAMES FOR SEGA'S 16-BIT CONSOLE

CHAOS
JULIAN GOLLOP ON HIS SPECTRUM HIT AND HIS NEW REBOOT PLANS

JORDAN MECHNER
PRINCE OF PERSIA'S CREATOR REVEALS HOW HIS VIDEOGAME JOURNEY STARTED

IMAGINE PUBLISHING
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ISSUE 112

BEST OF BRITISH



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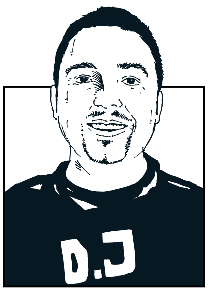
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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE MEGA DRIVE GAME



DARRAN JONES

While the conversion of *Strider* was amazing, my favourite Mega Drive game is easily *Thunder Force III.*

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2013

Favourite game of all time:
Strider/Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT

'Cor blimey, that's a toughie. I guess I'd have to say *Gunstar Heroes*. It's one of the finest games of the 16-bit generation and a Mega Drive exclusive to boot. It's Treasure's best game too.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently Playing:
Assassin's Creed III

Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed III



PAUL DAVIES

Gunstar Heroes, by Treasure. It is an adrenaline rush from start to end, with the most amazing animation bringing to life ultra-stylish heroes and enemies.

Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Halo 4

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



JASON KELK

I've always loved *Thunderforce III* on the Mega Drive, although *Thunderforce IV* comes in at a close second!

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Action Biker (Atari 8-bit)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



MARTYN CARROLL

Desert Strike. I played it rabidly when I should have been revising and nearly failed a bunch of exams as a result.

Expertise:
Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:
Jetpack Joyride

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DRURY

Back in the day it was *Virtua Racer* but now my vote goes to *Sub-Terrania*, a cracking, though crushingly difficult, take on *Thrust*.

Expertise:
Rollovers and skillshots

Currently playing:
Nintendoland

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



RICHARD BURTON

Ecco The Dolphin. Just everything about it is brilliant. Original, atmospheric, beautiful, eerie, relaxing and pretty much perfect in every way.

Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense

Currently playing:
The Lost Vikings

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



DAVID CROOKES

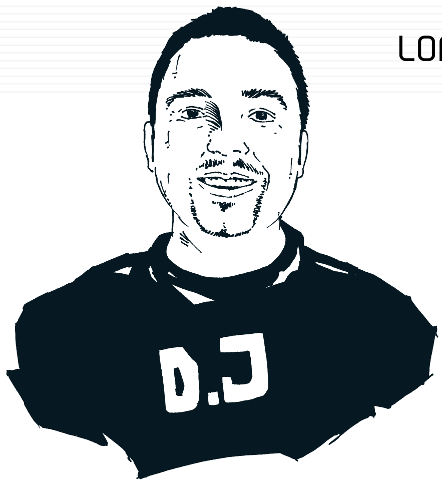
Super Monaco GP was, for me, a startling game because it was so much like the arcade original and yet somehow seemed superior.

Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
Super Monaco GP

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...



I'll never forget the first time I used the force. No I don't mean discovering that I had latent Jedi powers, which I then used to humiliate everyone who wronged me at school. No, I mean the amazing power-up that featured in Irem's *R-Type*. Of course, it wasn't the first time that I'd seen a power-up in action, but it was the first time that I'd experienced one that was so well thought out, crafted and lovingly put together.

Pac-Man's power pill may have been one of the earliest examples of power-ups, but they're still going strong today; even if they are now commonly referred to as perks in games like *Call Of Duty*. A good power-up not only enhances your avatar, but it also empowers you, allowing you to realise just how much digital death you can rain down on your onscreen foes. It's a feeling that remains immensely satisfying.

You never forget the first time those pesky ghosts turn blue in *Pac-Man*, or the gratifying effect of the Super Nashwan Power in *Xenon 2*, or the sense of freedom offered from *Mario*'s Tanooki suit. We've captured those memories and many others in our latest issue, and also managed to quiz developers about their own personal favourites and why power-ups are so essential to videogames.

Enjoy the magazine,

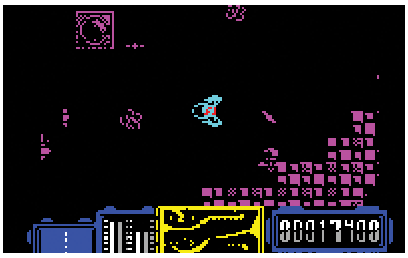


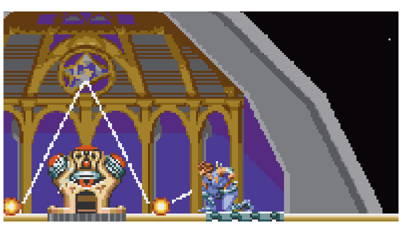


CONTENTS

>> Load 112 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



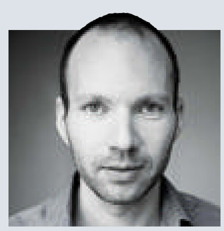




RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





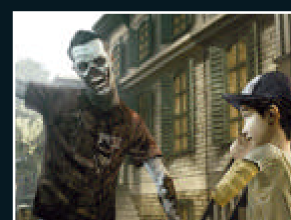
"Reinventing the survival horror genre" Samuel Roberts



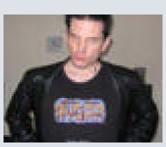
ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

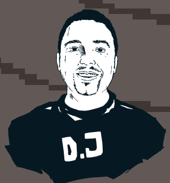






retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» It's been a relatively quiet month, unless of course you're Peter Molyneux and David Braben. Both developers received successful funding for their Kickstarter projects, meaning we should be getting a new god sim and Elite before this time next year

BRABEN AND OLIVER ON SUCCESS AND FAILURE

THE DEVELOPERS BEHIND TWO HIGH PROFILE KICKSTARTER PROJECTS REVEAL WHAT WENT RIGHT AND WRONG

It would appear that Kickstarter is quickly becoming a retro gamer's best friend. Although the Oliver twins recently failed to find funding for their ambitious *Dizzy* game, both David Braben and Peter Molyneux fared better with their own projects.

Project GODUS, which sees Peter Molyneux return to his god sim roots, sailed past its required pledge on 21 December after 30 days of pledging. 22 Cans, the studio behind it, required £450,000 to make *Project GODUS* a reality, but an enthusiastic Molyneux and a range of pledges and stretch goals saw a final tally of £526,563, more than enough to create the game for Mac, PC, Android and iOS.

Peter Molyneux wasn't the only legendary developer celebrating, as David Braben secured funding for his ambitious *Elite* sequel. *Elite: Dangerous* was first announced in early November and while its start was a little wobbly, Braben and his team listened to feedback and delivered plenty of key updates and a range of interesting pledges. When *Elite: Dangerous* was first revealed, Braben had requested funding for £1,250,000. Frontier Developments not only reached this goal, but managed to secure a total of £1,578,315, which will be enough to fund a Mac version as well.

"I was of course delighted when we crossed our target amount on Kickstarter – and doubly delighted as we hit our stretch goals too," Braben said to us. He isn't out of the woods just yet though, as now he has to deliver on an update on one of the most beloved space trading games of all time, and let's not forget he's got competition from the likes of Chris '*Wing Commander*' Roberts whose own game, *Star Citizen* was funded via Kickstarter. We'd imagine that having 25,681 backers to please is going to be a concern, but Braben remains confident. "I feel a big responsibility to the backers, yes, and certainly self-inflicted pressure to do a great job."

> "We were incredibly fortunate to have such fantastic supporters"

Although Braben and Molyneux have plenty to be happy about, the recent failure of *Dizzy Returns* proved that Kickstarter isn't the magic ticket for every retro franchise. It seemed like a sure thing on paper, but *Dizzy Returns* fell well short of its £350,000 asking price, amassing just £25,620, causing the Oliver twins to shut the campaign down early.

"Of course Philip and I were sad that the campaign was unsuccessful," revealed Andrew Oliver. "*Dizzy* has a very special place in our hearts and it's where our careers in the games industry started after all! As sad as it was though, the *Dizzy Returns* Kickstarter did in part achieve what it set out to, in gauging interest in the idea of a new *Dizzy* game. It's one of the reasons we chose Kickstarter as a platform – we found out that there wasn't enough interest in this particular vision of a new *Dizzy* game."

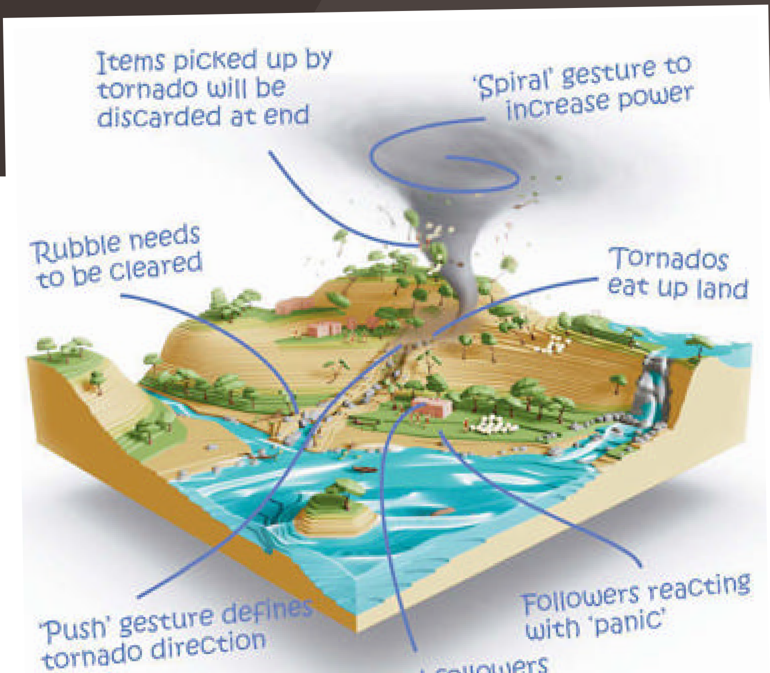
While the concept of a *Dizzy* game is sound, the Kickstarter audience



» [PC] *Elite: Dangerous* won't be out until 2014, just in time for the original game's thirtieth anniversary.

CONTENTS





» Although Peter Molyneux didn't reveal too much about the gameplay of *Project GODUS*, illustrations like this easily whetted the appetites of backers.

expects a certain amount of work from game developers. Andrew admits that they learned a lot from the campaign. "The main thing that prospective backers asked to see was some sort of gameplay or demo footage, anything that could visually show them what the game would like," he tells us. "As we learnt all too well, starting the campaign when we were still early in pre-development without this kind of material made it much harder to communicate our vision of *Dizzy Returns*. The majority of video game Kickstarter projects have been in production for some time, with some having been literally years in the making. We were incredibly fortunate though to have such fantastic supporters. We were bowled over by the kind comments and emails we received throughout the campaign, especially the fond remembrances people had of the original *Dizzy* games."

Despite this setback, this may not be the end of *Dizzy*, as Andrew reveals, "Our vision for *Dizzy Returns* was a very particular one; we may revisit the possibility of a new *Dizzy* game in the future, but the vision and scale of that game would need to be different."

Despite the disappointment, Andrew still feels that Kickstarter is a boon for the industry: "Kickstarter is a brilliant platform that celebrates creativity and originality, giving innovative projects the chance to succeed when they otherwise may find difficulty in finding funding. Giving people the chance to pitch their ideas for the community to fund is brilliant, and I hope we see more successful projects, especially games!"

David Braben feels the same way. "Kickstarter is quite important to our industry as it provides a new way to get games that are out of the ordinary made. It was fascinating to see the figures on the BBC this Christmas that showed, online at least, that the games business was bigger than the film/video business and music business put together, and yet the coverage we get publicly is much less than either of those more established businesses. Sites like Kickstarter helps illustrate this well."

Both *Project GODUS* and *Elite: Dangerous* are still some way away from completion but they continue to show the power of Kickstarter. With the likes of *Wasteland 2, Project Eternity, Star Citizen, Shadowrun Returns* and Double Fine's point-and-click adventure all due to hit, it's going to be an interesting 2013.



» *Dizzy* backers received a lovely parting thanks from the twins in the form of a PDF that highlighted the game concept.

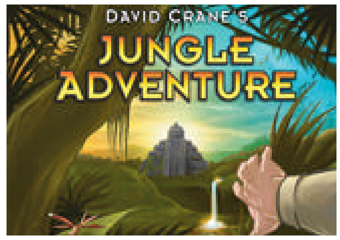
Kickstarted and stalled

>> A selection of projects that did and didn't make it



Wasteland 2 – Funded

This very well documented project effortlessly sailed passed its $900,000 goal, raising nearly $3 million in the process. It was spearheaded by the charismatic Brian Fargo, who worked tirelessly on the project's promotion.



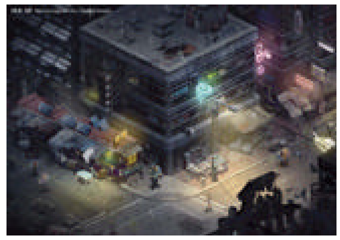
David Crane's Jungle Adventure – Not Funded

The co-founder of Activision was also looking for a cool $900,000 to fund his new take on the platforming genre. Unfortunately, unfocused updates and little movement on design meant it only managed $31,207.



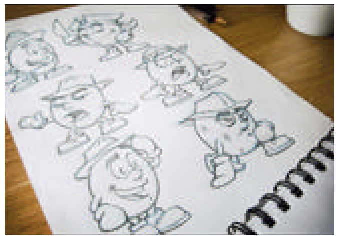
Elite: Dangerous: Funded

Elite started off a little slow and Braben initially faced criticism from some sceptics. He brushed it off however by delivering a huge amount of fascinating insights into *Elite*'s progress. It easily reached its stretch goal to fund a Mac version.



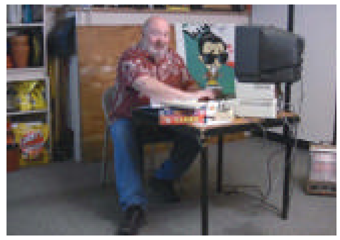
Shadowrun Returns: Funded

Another RPG which was easily kickstarted by fans of the genre. Harebrained Schemes required $400,000 to create its new game, but interest in the project and numerous updates eventually saw it finish on an impressive $1,836,447.



Dizzy Returns: Not Funded

After the release of *Dizzy* on iOS, it appeared Kickstarter would be a great way of bringing the 8-bit hero back. It was cancelled early, with the Oliver twins admitting that the £25,620 received was well short of the £350,000 they needed to make the game.



Leisure Suit Larry Remake: Funded

14,081 people had faith in Replay Games' high-definition remake of the original Leisure Suit Larry. So much faith in fact, that it easily raised $655,182 in the 31 days it ran for, easily achieving the $500,000 goal.



Star Citizen: Funded

Star Citizen's campaign only ran for a calendar month, but that didn't stop it from effortlessly smashing its $500,000 goal. Like *Wasteland 2*, it received fantastic publicity (courtesy of Chris Roberts) and it ended up finishing on an astonishing $2,134,374.



Pro Pinball: Revived & Remastered: Not Funded

Considering the pinball revival, we're amazed that *Pro Pinball* didn't reach its $400,000 goal. Famed pinball creator Pat Lawlor was involved, while digital versions of the original games were given away.

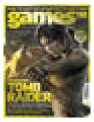
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All About Space



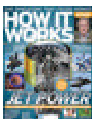
In issue 8 of **All About Space** you'll discover all of the exciting developments in space travel that will be happening in the next 12 months in the Space Race 2013 cover feature. Other highlights include ten amazing exoplanets, Eris and a tribute to the late Sir Patrick Moore.

gamesTM



Issue 130 of **gamesTM** kicks off with a look at what 2013 holds in store for the future of games. It also features a behind the scenes look at The Chaos Engine, reveals the greatest retro moments from *Retro City Rampage* and reviews on *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed* and *Epic Mickey: Power Of Illusion*.

How It Works



Issue 43 of **How It Works**, features jet power: the mindblowing propulsion delivered by incredible engines. It also explains the science of spacewalks and how astronauts perform extravehicular activities, and explore 50 amazing science facts that everybody should know about. Don't miss it.

Apps Magazine

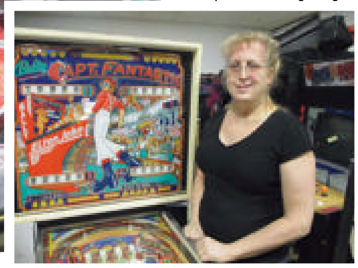


To launch our brand new Free section of **Apps Magazine**, we have a definitive list of the top 50 free games on iOS and Android devices. We also look at which classic arcade characters have best adapted for the smartphone generation. Is it Sonic, Pac-Man or the Space Invaders?

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» Arcade owner Sarah St. John poses with Reg Dwight.

THE PINBALL WIZARDS

PAUL DRURY TALKS TO THE OWNERS OF A CLASSIC ARCADE AND PINBALL LEAGUE

I've been collecting machines for over thirty years," smiles arcade owner Sarah St. John. "I've amassed so many, I wanted to share them with everybody."

Walking along the aisles of this magical place, you'll undoubtedly agree it's good to share. Located in Pelham, New Hampshire, USA, Pinball Wizard arcade houses over 170 videogame cabinets and almost a hundred pinball tables. *Robotron*, *Donkey Kong* and all your favourites are joined by such rarities as Bally Midway's *Crater Raider* and the imposing *Xenophobe*. Cabinets are thoughtfully arranged, too. Strolling along 'Fighters Row' will take you from *Street Fighter 2* to *Sailor Moon*, passing the *Mortal Kombat* and *Tekken* series on the way, providing a wonderful history lesson for beat-'em-up fans. Machines range from 1974's *Tank* right up to the recent four-player *Pac-Man Battle Royale*, though the emphasis is clearly on the classics. Seeing *Asteroids*, *Asteroids Deluxe* and *Blasteroids* all together made us rather dewy-eyed.

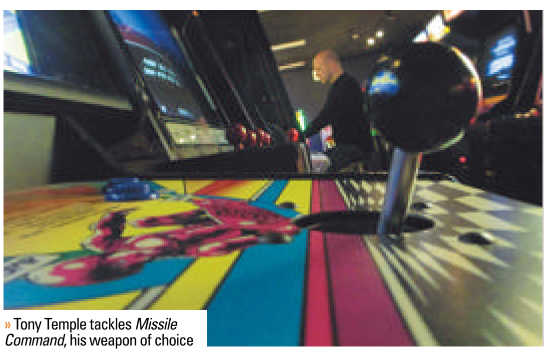
And that's before we get to the dazzling array of pinball machines on show. Tables from the Seventies, such as *Big Show* and *Kiss*, sit alongside perennial favourites *Addams Family* and *Twilight Zone*. Newly manufactured machines like *Lord Of The Rings* and *TRON* are recent additions, proving there's still life in the silver ball, though we most enjoyed hearing Eugene Jarvis's unmistakable sound effects as we played Williams' *Firepower* from 1980. If the size and scope of the collection wasn't impressive enough, the care and attention afforded to every machine on the floor is clear. "I put my heart and soul into these machines," says Sarah. "I want to play them too!"

> **"Tables from the Seventies sit alongside perennial favourites"**

She's not the only one. Inspect the marquees of such cabinets as *Centipede* and *Missile Command* and you'll see they've been signed by their respective world record holders and the *Ms Pac-Man* coder Steve Golson has also autographed his work. During our visit, *Mappy* maestro Greg 'The Slap' Bond swaggered into the arcade to take part in the regular Monday Night Pinball League, and showboated his flipper as well as joystick skills.

"We had our second annual pinball tournament this summer," explains Christina Wagaman, who has managed the arcade since it opened in 2011. "It's a three-day event and we had over a hundred entrants from all over the States and beyond. It was a really international crowd."

We asked if they had experienced any prejudice, given the industry has



» Tony Temple tackles *Missile Command*, his weapon of choice



» *Asteroids* update *Blasteroids* is best played on the original cabinet.

traditionally been male dominated? "A lot of people who come in presume a man owns it," says Christina, wryly. "They ask, 'Is he here?' and I have to say 'You mean *she*.'. But it's not been too difficult. A few people have old-fashioned values but they don't have to come in if they don't want to enjoy."

"Back in the Eighties when I was at high school, I was a technician, maintaining a route of pinball machines and videogames," adds Sarah. "I'd get called out to various bars, which could be kind of scary, and they would be a little surprised when a woman came in to do repairs. When I fixed the machine though, they were more than happy."

Both women have big plans for the future, explaining how they have well over a hundred games in storage, with space to increase the arcade's cab count by almost two hundred. A tour of the back room is as fascinating as walking around the arcade. We spot a treasure trove of gaming treats in various stages of restoration and can't help smiling at a *Captain Fantastic* table with its guts hanging out.

Before we leave, we ask about Pinball Wizard's clientele. Is it mainly teenage boys in heavy metal T-shirts like back in the day? "We have a lot of families coming in," laughs Sarah. "We have stools so children can get up there and play the bigger games." Christina smiles. "When arcades first opened, we were the kids that went there to have fun. Having a place like this helps us relive and remember those good times. It's really fun to do that for people."

If you needed more encouragement to visit this cave of wonders, note that it's close to Funspot, the biggest arcade in the world. New Hampshire should clearly be the destination of choice for discerning retro gamers. See www.pinballwizardarcade.com and when you visit, tell them **RG** sent you.

Many thanks to Tony 'MC' Temple for the photography.

You Must Play

» Amongst Pinball Wizard's many wonders, here are half a dozen machines that should put a spell on you…



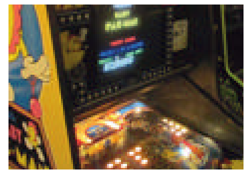
Tank (Kee Games, 1974)

The father of *Combat* on the VCS, this tank battler remains remarkably playable despite being almost four decades old. Gripping the ancient twin-stick controller tightly and rumbling towards your enemy is gloriously nostalgic.



Space Invaders (Bally, 1980)

The striking backdrop, which undoubtedly owes a debt to *Alien*, and beating heartbeat of this fast-paced table will transport you back to the glory days of the arcade. Not unlike a trip to Pinball Wizard itself.



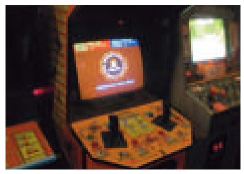
Baby Pac-Man (Bally, 1982)

Taking a 'best of both worlds' approach, this hybrid combines videogame pill-munching on the upper screen and a cute pinball playfield at the bottom, accessed by directing your infant Pac-Man through one of the tunnels.



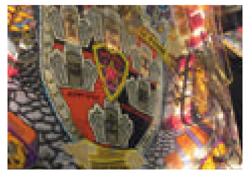
Ice Cold Beer (Taito, 1983)

A brilliant, ball bearing balancing rarity, which requires a steady hand and nerves of steel as you try to carefully steer your shiny sphere using only a metal bar and two joysticks. Despite its name, this is a sobering challenge.



Exterminator (Gottlieb, 1989)

Control a giant disembodied hand to crush marauding insects in various scenes of surreal domesticity. Created by Warren Davis of *Q*Bert* fame, he estimates only 250 cabinets were made, making this a rare treat.



Medieval Madness (Williams, 1997)

A splendid table from pinball's last hurrah in the late Nineties, this is one of the most played pins in the arcade. Also features the voice of Tina Fey doing her best Dick Van Dyke impression. No, really.

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

PLAYER 1 LEVEL 01 BONUS 0990 TIME 89



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Is Chuckie Egg the greatest platformer of all time?

I think it is. First of all, the character you control is just wonderfully designed. Look at that hat, that bulbous belly. Memorable character attributes that are equally if not more striking than a pair of red dungarees and a Seventies porn star moustache. It's criminal then that right now, most of you are struggling to remember his name. It should be a pub quiz question, but it isn't. The answer of course is Hen House Henry, a much catchier moniker than Sonic The Hedgehog – where's the alliteration, Sega? Schoolboy error.

What also makes the game so great is the sheer simplicity of it. You jump around, collecting bird feed and eggs while dodging some hens. Utter genius. The levels are built with love, skill and wit and they're not completely impossible, unlike *Manic Miner*, a game that is far more popular and in my opinion, much less fun. And just when you think you've got it sussed and you can't be surprised anymore, boom, they release that sodding great duck and all hell breaks loose.

Nigel Alderton, the child genius responsible for this work of art should be lauded up there with the likes of Matthew Smith, Peter Molyneux and Shigeru Miyamoto, but guess what, he isn't.

And I'm going to admit something now that I don't think I've ever shared before. This takes my geekiness to brand new heights and may even shock the less socially integrated members of our small, elite little network of retro heads.

I used to play the tape of *Chuckie Egg*, BBC version, and listen to the loading noise as if it were music. I think I even danced to it. I didn't just do this once or twice; I did it a lot. I genuinely thought it sounded catchy, musical… ethereal almost. Of course, it didn't. It sounded bloody awful. What a massive twat I was. But that's how far my devotion to *Chuckie Egg* went.

Did any of you do anything like that? Probably not or if you did, you probably won't admit it.

What's makes me sad is that *Chuckie Egg* hasn't been rediscovered or remade. There was the awful *Chuckie Egg 2*, and then some odd semi-official hacked version, but that's it. Where's the 3D adventure game? The first-person shooter? The cartoon series, movies and toy tie-ins? They never surfaced, and maybe that's a good thing. If there had just been the first couple of *Sonic* games, then perhaps I would still have some respect for what was for a short while, a really exciting character and game. But sadly, pretty much everything Sonic has been involved with since then has sucked a fat one.

So, m'lud, I rest my case. *Chuckie Egg* is perhaps the finest platform game of all time, and no one can argue with that.

I used to listen to the loading noise as if it were music. I think I even danced to it

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



When I'm Ultra 64

Isn't it great sometimes to spend an entire weekend playing your favourite game, eating pizza out of the box, wearing the same clothes and not bothering to have a wash? That's just me? Oh.

Among the benefits of being old and crusty, holding memories that younger guys can never claim is in my Top 3, alongside a crappy hairstyle I no longer care about and Zen monk mastery of the cup of tea. But while some things stay in the past, like maybe Tenpole Tudor, gaming always feels like it's my present – always appealing, always appropriate. Games always feel like my thing.

For me, and others of my g-g-generation, the gaming situation is unique among entertainment. Games and gaming are still evolving – not just what they are, but who they're for. When I was age 10 in 1979, *Space Invaders* and soon *Pac-Man* were seaside attractions ideal for a kid to spend a handful of change from parents wanting peace and quiet on the beach. By the time I was 20, games had become a permanent fixture of the teenage bedroom, and I'd spent many happy years with arcade conversions and the beginnings of console greats such as *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Sonic*.

PlayStation and Sega Saturn were an ideal proposition for young professionals with a decent disposable income, which (don't laugh) described me pretty well – even though I was already on this side of the industry. Titles such as *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby*, *Daytona USA* and *Virtua Fighter* were high-end experiences for £300 entertainment systems. The CD allowed Sony especially to target soundtracks at bar-crawling demographics with, like The Prodigy and Chemical Brothers.

By the time I was 40 in 2009, the heroes matured from brightly coloured anthropomorphic hedgehogs and bandicoots to armour-clad warriors and wise-cracking movie-like avatars. And the price of entry grew higher so the target audience became older still. The kind of games that appeal to me most now simply did not, could not, exist when I was too young/broke to fully appreciate them. It's just so convenient, I count my lucky stars.

Oh, and the Master Chief is in his forties, or thereabouts. So, yeah, I like to think he could be me! Anyway… My concern lately is that, say 20 years from now, games will no longer hold any kind of appeal to my slow-witted brain and even slower fingers. But I would love it if an old Cliffy B or Hideo Kojima would pursue ideas age-appropriate to them, meaning that it would continue to be age-appropriate for me. No idea what this would be, but then again no amount of fizzy Vimto and Atomic Thunderbusters would have helped teen-me foresee that a tactical shooter like *Galaga* could lead to *Halo 4*.

It breaks my heart to think that at some stage along this long journey the road is just going to end, and I don't wanna be retracing my steps, trying to put myself in the mind and body of a person I left behind.

The kind of games that appeal to me now simply did not exist when I was young

retrodiary

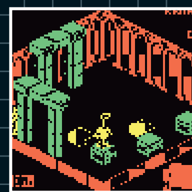
31 January – 1 March

>> A month of retro events both past and present



31 January 1999
■ The USA and PlayStation 1 were the first to see a new survival horror franchise born. Welcome to Silent Hill…

1 February 1991
■ The developer behind *Quake* and *Doom*, id Software is formed.



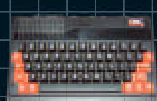
3 February 1986
■ Gargoyle Games' isometric arcade adventure *Sweevo's World* is released on the Spectrum. I really want to see those fingers… and gnomes…

4 February 2003
■ Stand by your bongos – it's the UK release of *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* on the GameCube.





8 February 2012
■ *Gotham City Impostors*, a first person shooter set in the *Batman* universe, is released Europe-wide on the PS3.



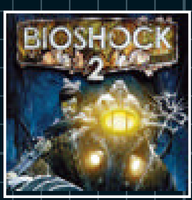
6 February 1984
■ The Oric Atmos complete with its professional feel keyboard and tasteful black and red colour scheme is released.



6 February 1983
■ Durell Software released the deep sea diving/treasure hunting game *Scuba Dive* on the Spectrum.



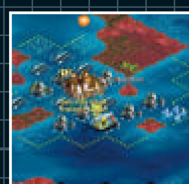
4 February 2011
■ Developed by Square Enix and released in the UK on Nintendo Wii was *Mario Sports Mix*.



9 February 2010
■ First-person shooter *BioShock 2* is released worldwide on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.



14 February 1983
■ Imagine released its colourful shoot-'em-up *Arcadia* on the Spectrum complete with strange aliens and wobbly pin enemies…



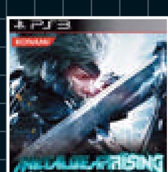
17 February 1999
■ Sid Meier's *Alpha Centauri* is released in the UK on PC.



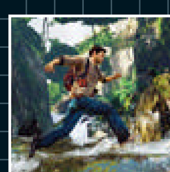
17 February 2006
■ LucasArts releases *Star Wars: Empire At War*, a real time strategy game for the PC set in the time between Episode 3 and Episode 4.



27 February 1996
■ *Pokémon Red*, the first *Pokémon* game for Nintendo's Game Boy, is initially released in Japan.



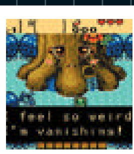
22 February 2013
■ *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* is due to be released on the PS3 in Europe.



22 February 2012
■ *Uncharted* makes its debut on the new PlayStation Vita in the form of *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*.



20 February 1987
■ Brand new coin-op run and gun action arrives the release of *Gryzor* by Konami in your arcade. 10p pieces at the ready…



27 February 2001
The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Ages and *Oracle Of Seasons* are released simultaneously in Japan on Game Boy Colour.



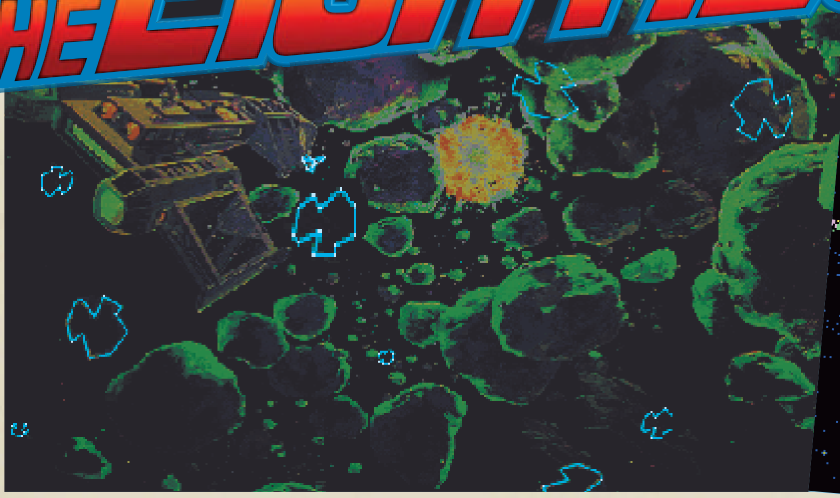
27 February 2009
■ SNK's *Metal Slug 7* is released in Europe on the Nintendo DS.

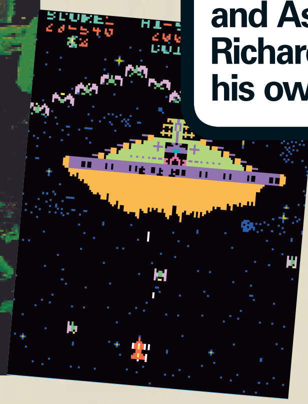
28 February 2005
■ Games developer and *Fallout* creator Troika Games closes its doors for the final time after going bust.



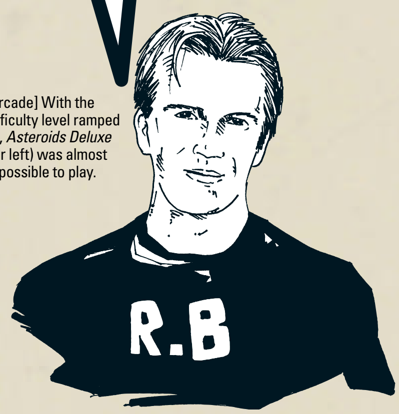
1 March 2013
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES





MARCH 1981 – Sinclair Research is born, ZX81 is unleashed, JK Greye arrives, VIC-20 almost here, Phoenix lands in arcades and Asteroids goes deluxe. Richard Burton finds cream for his own asteroids…



» [Arcade] With the difficulty level ramped up, *Asteroids Deluxe* (far left) was almost impossible to play.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1981

March 1981 was a big month for UK home computing. Sinclair Computers Ltd, formerly Science Of Cambridge, formerly Sinclair Instrument Ltd, formerly Westminster Mail Order and so forth and so on. eventually became the company all fans of Clive Sinclair came to know and love, Sinclair Research Ltd. and this month it released the ZX81 computer.

The ZX81 arrived as the successor to the ZX80, launched in February 1980 as the first sub £100 home computer. The ZX80 undoubtedly piqued interest in home computing by making it affordable to the masses with eventual sales of 100,000 units but would they upgrade to the new machine and could Sinclair pull in a new audience? The ZX81 was available in kit form at £49.95 or if there was the slightest danger of you burning your face off with a soldering iron, a pre-built machine could be yours for £69.95. Much safer and fewer smouldering hair smells.

So, the ZX81 was here with its 1K of RAM and its Z80 CPU. Although it garnered praise from most quarters, the limitations of the machine also concerned many. A RAM pack boosting the RAM to 16K was introduced (or re-introduced as it was a rebadged ZX80 RAM pack), with the RAM expandable up to a potentially mind-bendingly extravagant 64K. The touch membrane keyboard was relatively unresponsive but adequate, graphics were black and white only and there was no sound. Yet, incredibly, the ZX81 took off like a rocket. Software houses started selling ZX81 games, and add-ons were being created from expansion packs to new keyboards. The ZX81 really inspired a pioneering spirit and the UK home computing market never really looked back.



» *Asteroids Deluxe* was a severe disappointment. Don't play it.

JK Greye Software was one of the first software houses to begin producing ZX81 software. Although its early games titles were simple 1K affairs, we didn't have to wait long for Malcolm Evans, who joined John Greye's company a few months after it was formed, to produce the utterly amazing *3D Monster Maze*. Jaws dropped, reviewers went bonkers and ZX81 gaming had come of age.

Commodore was also very busy with the news that its new colour home computer, the VIC-20, would be released within the next few months. The VIC-20 had been mooted for a long time, making its very first appearance in June 1980 at the Computer Electronics Show in the USA but had, as of yet, not made its commercial debut in the UK. It had already been

MARCH 1981 NEWS

30 March saw the attempted assassination of US President, Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley Jr when he shot six times at Reagan with a .22 revolver. Although all six shots missed, one ricocheted off the Presidential limousine and hit Reagan in the chest seriously injuring him. Three others were hurt including Press Secretary James Brady who was hit in the head and as a result suffered partial paralysis. At Hinckley's trial in 1982, he was found not guilty by reason of insanity; a verdict that caused uproar across America.

29 March: the first London Marathon was run with a field of 7747 runners, 6255 of which finished the race. The Men's Elite Race finished with a remarkable dead heat between American Dick Beardsley and Norwegian Inge Simonsen who crossed the finishing line holding hands. In the Women's Elite Race 43-year-old Joyce Smith triumphed. She still remains the oldest female winner of the London Marathon.



21 March saw the demise of the Fourth Doctor in the much loved science fiction series *Doctor Who*. Tom Baker had been playing the part of the Doctor for seven years and was due to be replaced by the Fifth Doctor, Peter Davison in the fourth and final part of Logopolis. In it the Doctor, while trying to thwart The Master's plot to cause the heat death of the universe, saves the day by literally pulling the plug on The Master's plans before falling from a radio telescope dish to his imminent regeneration.



» *Phoenix* was an arcade sensation helped in no small part by it's iconic mothership level.

shipped to retailers in the USA in January/February and reaction was very favourable. Touted as the first colour computer to be priced under $300, gamers and programmers alike snapped it up.

The VIC-20 would become available in shops shortly after it made its UK debut at the Commodore Pet Show on 18 June and reaction remained positive. It's little wonder that by the end of the 1982, the VIC-20 had sold over 1 million units worldwide. The VIC-20 had a 6502 CPC and 5K of RAM, although only 3.5K was available once the system had claimed its chunk. However, RAM cartridges could expand the memory up to a hefty 64K if required. It also had a very professional-feeling keyboard compared to several of the UK home computers, which kept costs low by cutting out a quality keyboard in favour of the unresponsive membrane type.

The VIC-20 was also very expandable and an array of impressive peripherals could be connected such as a floppy disk drive, modem and printer. It looked to be the complete package. The only potential stumbling block for Commodore was not whether the VIC-20 would be well received but whether they could manufacture enough of them to go round.

Arcade coin-op fans were in for a treat this month with the arrival of a classic to UK shores. Developed by Amstar and released by Centuri and Taito, depending on your territory, was *Phoenix*.



Wave after wave of new *Space Invader* clones were quickly becoming unimaginative and repetitive. While *Phoenix* was still at heart a top down fixed shooter, Amstar took a leaf from *Galaxian*'s book with swooping enemies with an unpredictable flight path. *Phoenix* had five distinct levels; 1 and 2 were standard *Space Invader* style levels with the addition of the swooping birds, levels 3 and 4 featured space eggs that hatch into large phoenixes that swoop erratically and then level 5 introduced the mothership which proved to be a different challenge.

The mothership level was one of the first instances of a boss level in a videogame with the task of shooting through the large mothership hull and taking out the alien boss at the centre of the ship. Once completed it was back through the levels again with increased difficulty. *Phoenix* became a worldwide hit and rightly so with its ingenious tweaking of the *Space Invaders* formula.

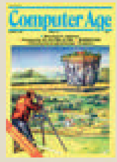
Atari announced it would be releasing a sequel to its hugely popular *Asteroids* coin-op this month, the imaginatively titled *Asteroids Deluxe*. The original *Asteroids* was a massive hit but was also relatively easy to play with players able to stay playing for hours on one credit. *Asteroids Deluxe* attempted to redress this situation by ramping up the difficulty level. Unfortunately Atari overestimated the average game player's ability and soon found that it was virtually unplayable. Machines were recalled, the difficulty level toned down and a happy medium found.

So would *Asteroids Deluxe* take the world by storm like the original did? No. It turned out to be a big commercial flop with the tweaks to the original game deemed to be detrimental to the gameplay. It seemed, even back then, old school gaming ruled.



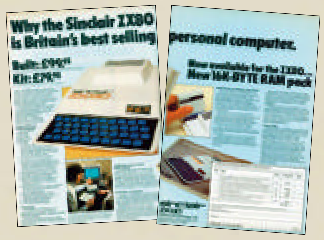
» [ZX81] Who would've thought the black and white graphics of *3D Monster Maze* could create such atmosphere?

THIS MONTH IN...



COMPUTER AGE

With the ZX81 having been released this month you'd be forgiven for thinking the ZX80 had been mothballed. Nope, it was still going strong yet oddly more expensive than the new boy, priced at £79.95 and £99.95 for kit and built systems respectively. An absolute bargain.





BYTE

American magazine *Byte* had adverts for the ZX80, yours for under $200 and a 26MB hard drive for a smidge under $5000. How technology and prices have changed; the ZX80 is worth three times its original price while the hard drive would be used as a doorstop today.





ANALOG

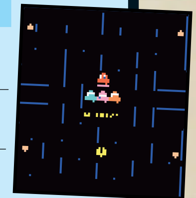
Issue two of *ANALOG* (Atari Newsletter And Lots Of Games – yes, seriously) was a text heavy magazine that flitted between programming and gaming. One new development was the Atari Communicator, which would get your 400 or 800 linked to various home information databases via your acoustic coupler styled set-up.



CHARTS

MARCH 1981

ARCADE



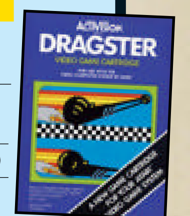
1 Pac-Man (Namco)
2 Missile Command (Atari)
3 Battlezone (Atari)
4 Defender (Williams Electronics)
5 Space Panic (Universal)

GAME & WATCH



1 Fire (Nintendo)
2 Manhole (Nintendo)
3 Helmet (Nintendo)
4 Vermin (Nintendo)
5 Flagman (Nintendo)

ATARI 2600



1 Dragster (Activision)
2 Pele's Soccer (Atari)
3 Video Pinball (Atari)
4 Fishing Derby (Activision)
5 Golf (Atari)

MUSIC

1 Jealous Guy (Roxy Music)
2 This Ole House (Shakin' Stevens)
3 Kids In America (Kim Wilde)
4 Kings Of The Wild Frontier (Adam & The Ants)
5 Shaddup Your Face (Joe Dolce)



BACK TO THE NINETIES CHARTS



NOVEMBER 1995

PSONE

1 Tekken (Namco)
2 Ridge Racer (Namco)
3 Jumping Flash (Sony)
4 Gunners' Heaven (Sony)
5 Ace Combat (Namco)

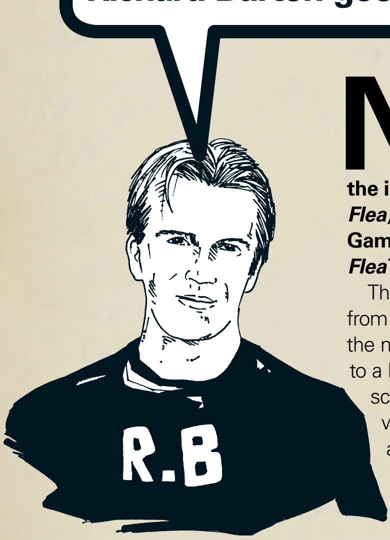


» [Sega Saturn] *Golden Axe: The Duel* was hopeless in the arcades and pitiful on the Saturn. Just a general disappointment really.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1995

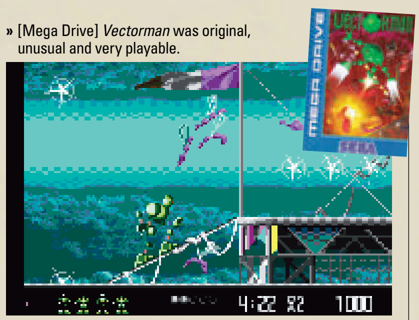
NOVEMBER 1995 – Vectorman graces the Mega Drive, Alone In The Dark 2 scares no one, Jaguar is treated to some Mutant Penguins, new Golden Axe game is duel drivel, Thunderhawk returns and Sega's Nomad gets lost. Richard Burton goes wandering…



Now fleas haven't had the most auspicious videogaming history with an appearance in *Centipede* and starring in the infuriatingly difficult *Bugaboo (The Flea)* so would things change with GameTek's new SNES game *Frantic Flea*? Not really.

The aim was simply to save baby fleas from an evil alien machine and escape to the next level. *Frantic Flea* was restricted to a North American only release. The side scrolling platform was enjoyable enough with excellent cartoon-style graphics and character animation but was too difficult and had sluggish controls – no matter how tempting the graphics were, it was one to avoid.

» [Mega Drive] *Vectorman* was original, unusual and very playable.



Also new this month and developed by Blue Sky for the Mega Drive was *Vectorman*, a perfectly blended combination of platforming and blasting. Your robot character was left on Earth to clean up the mess after humans have migrated off to other planets. As you were constructed of orbs, you could morph into various forms that could then be utilised in gameplay such as a drill for breaking through walls. The sublime 3D pre-rendered graphics were superb, the gameplay first class and the level design inspired. A classic Mega Drive game yet often criminally overlooked.

Infogrames revealed that it was converting its hit survival horror game *Alone In The Dark 2* onto PSone and the Sega Saturn, having had success with the recently released PC and 3DO versions. You once again play supernatural private investigator Edward Carnby who has been tasked with finding a kidnapped girl being held in a gangster's mansion. Much puzzlement and action ensues with gangsters and ghostly pirate shenanigans occurring.

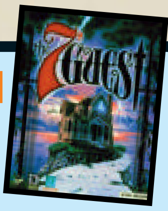
The eeriness of the first *Alone In The Dark* had been dampened down significantly with the combat element taking centre stage which, for a survival horror game, was disappointing. It was a challenging puzzle adventure with great graphics but where were the shivers and a sudden case of the willies? Not here sadly. Still, it sold well enough on the Saturn and PSone to warrant a third instalment.

A new game out for the Atari Jaguar was *Attack Of The Mutant Penguins*, sounding like something Matthew Smith's warped mind might've manufactured, it had been developed by Sunrise Games.

The premise was simple; you play one of two humans tasked with saving Earth from an invasion of mutant alien penguins. Armed with either a frying pan or baseball, you must then stop the alien penguins tipping the balance on the Doomscale; a large set of scales counter balanced with good penguins. If it tipped in the aliens' favour, it was curtains for the Earth.

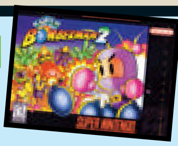
Normally games that try too hard to be irreverent or wacky end up being merely

PC



1. The 7th Guest (MicroProse)
2. Mech Warrior 2 (Activision)
3. Day Of The Tentacle (LucasArts)
4. Dark Forces (Virgin Interactive)
5. Final Unity (Virgin Interactive)

SNES



1. Super Bomberman 2 (Hudson Soft / Virgin)
2. Primal Rage (Time Warner)
3. Animaniacs (Konami)
4. Rise Of The Robots (Acclaim / Mirage)
5. Mortal Kombat 2 (Acclaim)

MUSIC



1. I Believe / Up On The Roof (Robson & Jerome)
2. Gangsta's Paradise (Coolio Featuring LV)
3. Wonderwall (Oasis)
4. Missing (Everything But The Girl)
5. You'll See (Madonna)

annoying. *Mutant Penguins* wasn't one of these. It was a terrific action game with *Parodius* cartoon-style graphics that worked an absolute treat let down ever so slightly by being devoid of any in-game music. Strangely it bombed in retail.

Another interesting looking Jaguar game was *Zero Five*. With a single level demo having been shown at a recent Atari show, the slick 3D polygon style graphics of this frenetic shoot-'em-up game topped off with an ingenious free floating camera viewpoint looked good. Unfortunately, by the time Zero Five had belatedly been released by Telegames in 1997, the Atari Jaguar was sadly an all but dead system. If only games of *Zero Five*'s calibre had been released during the Jaguar's early days, more people may have warmed to the system, and it could have lasted a little longer.

Having just been released in Japan for the Sega Saturn, *Golden Axe: The Duel* was due for its European

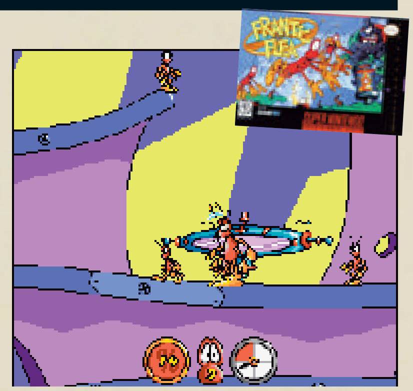


release very soon. *The Duel* departs from the usual Golden Axe formulaic side-scrolling beat-'em-up game, instead plumping for a *Street Fighter II* styled affair. It was never going to be a challenger to *Street Fighter*'s crown and unfortunately *The Duel* only succeeded in being slated. That said, the arcade coin-op original faired little better which begged the question why bother releasing it in the first place?

Developed by Raven Software and published by id Software was *Hexen: Beyond Heretic*, which was released this month on PC. The medieval/fantasy based first person shooter was the follow up to *Heretic*, the first game in the series and being an id Software development used a modified *Doom* engine for its basis. This allowed for eight-person multiplayer games and introduced different styles of character; you could be a mage, fighter or cleric with their own characteristics and weapons.

Hexen did very well on release, which persuaded iD to develop Saturn, PSone and N64 versions, although these wouldn't appear for a further eighteen months.

Sega Mega-CD owners probably knew all about *Thunderhawk*, the combat flight simulator game from Core Design, as the blurb advertising the sequel *Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2* boasted that the game was owned by 80 per cent of all Mega-CD owners. So it needed little introduction, but would it be as good as the undeniably excellent original? Thankfully it would turn



» [SNES] *Frantic Flea* promised much but delivered nice graphics wrapped in awkward gameplay.

out to be just as great, possibly even better, with the graphics a lot more detailed and the gameplay faster and free flowing. It was good stuff for Mega-CD owners but also for Saturn and PSone gamers who would also get their own conversions.

Not so good for Sega were the sales indicators for its newly released Sega Nomad, or Sega Genesis Nomad, handheld console. Essentially a handheld version of the Mega Drive and released only in the US and Japan, it was technically very good with a full colour backlit display and the ability to play games from any region, but fell short on its woeful battery life. The Nomad didn't grab the imagination of gamers at all, even when the price was slashed from $179 to $79. Unfortunately for Sega this was one Nomad that lost its way.

NOVEMBER 1995 NEWS

20 November saw the BBC television programme Panorama broadcast the infamous hour long Martin Bashir interview with Diana, Princess Of Wales, in which she admitted to having an adulterous affair with James Hewitt. She also spoke candidly about her problems with depression and bulimia and the pain of the relationship between her husband Charles and his long time friend, Camilla Parker-Bowles.

Despite a very complex marriage arrangement, she admitted she didn't want to get a divorce. A month later the Queen informed both Prince Charles and Diana that she wanted them to divorce. Nine months later they had officially separated.

20 November also saw more television history with the first showing of the cookery game show, *Can't Cook, Won't Cook,* hosted by Ainsley Harriott. It became the staple daytime television viewing of students for the next five years.

24 November saw the UK premiere of *GoldenEye*, the seventeenth James Bond film and the first for new 007 actor Pierce Brosnan. *GoldenEye* was a huge hit and

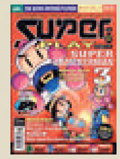


rejuvenated the Bond franchise after the Timothy Dalton era, and included some of the most memorable Bond baddies, including Famke Janssen as the dangerous and deadly femme fatale Xenia Onatopp.

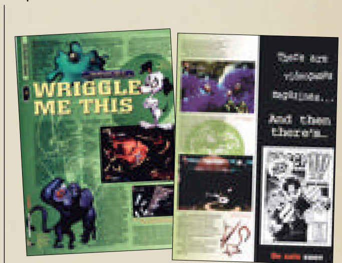
19 November saw the world premiere of *Toy Story*, the first full length computer animated movie, and the first to be produced by Pixar, starring the voice acting of Tom Hanks as Woody and Tim Allen as Buzz Lightyear. It was well received, making $361 million worldwide.

THIS MONTH IN...

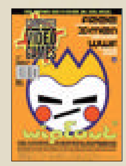
SUPERPLAY



A preview of Shiny Entertainment's *Earthworm Jim 2* for Saturn, SNES, Mega Drive and PSone featured. It looked like another terrific platform shooter game with suitably comedic gameplay on the beautifully designed levels. Unfortunately and undeservedly that formula resulted in poor sales.



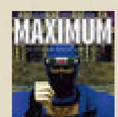
COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



Highlighting the much ignored Sega 32X, *C&VG* reviewed its version of *Virtua Fighter* and were stunned. It was the best version and it contained every character and every single move from the coin-op. Had this been around when the 32X was released, gamers would've snapped up 32X units.



MAXIMUM



With gamers everywhere wanting news regarding Nintendo's upcoming N64, *Maximum* interviewed Nintendo and got some interesting N64 questions answered such as the reason for making it cartridge based rather the CD and the hint of a new *Mario Kart* game.





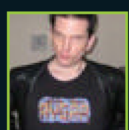
RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: STEPHEN WESTWOOD
» JOINED: 27 JULY 2011
» LOCATION: UK
» OCCUPATION: NOT GIVEN
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: NOT GIVEN

Don Doko Don

THE DON OF PLATFORMERS

#58



» ARCADE
» TAITO CORPORATION
» 1989

What is it about princesses getting kidnapped by dragons? What is the dragon going to do with them anyway? Actually I don't want to think about that, I'd rather get on with the job of rescuing her. What shall I be this time? Barbarian with sword and shield? Military soldier with flame-throwing super gun? Nope. I think this time I will be a gnome with a little hammer, called Bob, and I'll bring my brother Jim along to help.

This is one of those cute platformers that owes a lot to *Bubble Bobble*'s legacy, but as it's by the same makers, Taito, I will let them off. You start off in the colourful nature-inspired world with a backdrop of trees and some nasty mushroom critters to get rid of. Hitting a baddie with your hammer squishes them so that you are then able to pick them up. Press fire again and you will throw them, turning them into fruit that will give you more points. You can lift more than one squished enemy at a time, though they can slow you down with their weight and when they start to wiggle let them go or you'll be for it. Throwing the wounded at the living will kill that baddie too. It's fairly simple stuff, but great fun, especially in co-op play.

Each world encompasses ten screens, with a boss battle at the end. The only way to kill each boss is to throw the enemies it spawns back at it. There is quite a lot of variation between the five worlds, which are all loosely themed and have their own catchy jolly tune. Each screen adds an extra idea in the mix with the odd power up, blocks to smash or push, and new enemies in each.

Sometimes the screen is full of foes, especially when the damn kings keep throwing out endless *Alice in Wonderland*-style walking playing cards. And then there are those caterpillars that suck you in with their long tongues. Yep, it can get pretty frustrating, but isn't that part of the key to addictiveness? Survive as long as you can on one credit to get your score up, then die and its back to zero to challenge you again... just as it should be.

I've saved the princess a couple of times and she just moans about the king being missing. No pleasing some people, eh?

Want to appear in the magazine?

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GREATEST EVER POWER-UPS

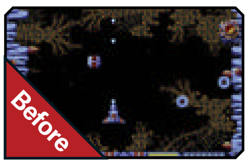
Without the fabled power-up many a videogame would be dull, impossible and forgettable. Pac-Man wouldn't be anywhere near as entertaining without Power Pellets, R-Type would be insanely difficult without the Force, and with no transformation aspect Altered Beast would probably be the worst Sega game ever made. Join **Retro Gamer** then as we play with power and speak to developers to compile a list of the greatest and most memorable power-ups in gaming

Super Nashwan Power



From: *Xenon 2: Megablast*
Format: Amiga, ST, SMS, Mega Drive, Game Boy, Acorn Archimedes
Year: 1989
Created by: The Bitmap Brothers

Not the follow up single to *Gangnam Style*, but the name given to the ship in *Xenon 2* in its most powerful state. Making the ship roughly a third of the screen width, it transforms it into a mobile firework display, filling the screen with an insane amount of bullets, rockets and lasers that no enemy will be able to escape from. Trivia lovers may be interested to learn that this particular power-up takes its name from a famous racehorse, and the Nashwan reference appears in a couple of other Bitmap Brothers' games, including *Speedball 2* and *Gods*.





MAX

Power Pellet





From: *Pac-Man*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1980
Created by: Namco

The Power Pellet is basically the power-up in its purest form. It's a dot, its invincibility effects are temporary, and it turns the tables on your aggressors in superb fashion – transforming Pac-Man from a pathetic yellow mouth to an unstoppable all-consuming monster that even the already dead aren't safe from. Pac's power ranking goes from bullied sullied pizza to Superman instantly, and the moment it happens is wonderfully satisfying. Another great aspect of this particular power-up is the fact that Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde will amusingly clock what's happened and react in a believable way. The second Pac pops that pellet in his mouth, those annoying spooks will turn blue with fear and start trying to escape his terrifying chomping bear trap of a gob.



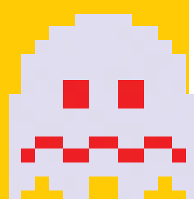


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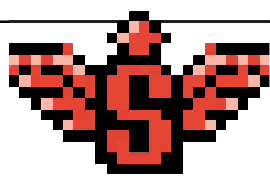


Tim Wright (aka CoLD SToRAGE), musician

"Greatest power-up? Hmm.... I'd probably have to say either *Pac-Man* power pellets, where you can eat the ghosts – 'Vengeance is MINE' sayeth the little round yellow gobbly man! Or, Berserk mode in *Doom*. 'Gah! Arghhh.... Hyarrr!'"



Spread Gun



From: *Contra*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1987
Created by: Konami

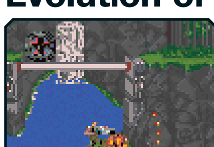
The alien-infested jungle island where *Contra* is set is a hostile place. Exploding bridges, heavily armoured bastions, deadly aliens and one-hit deaths must all be circumvented, so it's good that Konami evened up the score a jot by dropping in a selection of powerful weapons for its two heroes to use (though the laser sucks). Everyone has their favourite weapon in the series, and ours is the Spread Gun – even though in reality a spread gun would be the worst gun in the history of weapon design (it's a gun that you can't aim with any kind of precision and can only be used to take out targets with no innocent bystanders within a fifty mile radius of them). With enemies attacking from above, below and beside, this gun lets you run and gun more confidently than any other in the game.

MAX

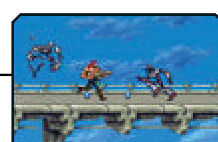


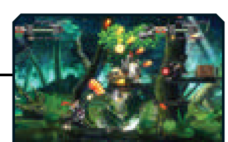


Evolution of a power-up


Contra
Arcade, 1987


Contra III: The Alien Wars
SNES, 1992


Contra 4
DS, Mobile, 2007


Hard Corps: Uprising
X360, PS3, 2011



Q&A

Andrew Braybrook discusses the value and creation of power-ups

Why are power-ups important?
It's about tipping the balance in your favour, giving you some temporary superiority. As a gaming mechanism, if you have to earn it then it gives a tangible reward, rather than just points. Then it makes the game a little easier to play. When you're paying per game to play it can become vital to making that 10p go further. Showing my age now, sorry!

What makes a great power-up?
I like a power-up that you can build up, but preferably you don't lose completely if you restart, i.e. the game continuity flows on when you lose a life and you have a brief opportunity to pick up some of the power-ups that you had. From a balance viewpoint a power-up shouldn't be too powerful. The homing missiles of *Slap Fight* are a great help, though slightly slow, and they make you lazy. Probably I would want to keep the forward-firing guns in that game.

What's the best power-up you've seen and why?
I like the rainbows in *Rainbow Islands*. You can do so many different things with them: walk on them, jump on them, make them fall so that they are a weapon, and the fact that you can have one, two, three, even four at a time strung together. They were very flexible. In fact the whole bonus and power-up system in *Rainbow Islands* was beautifully designed. Inwardly complex and outwardly looking quite random; it was very controlled based on statistics of the way the game was being played, so it could be predicted and influenced.

How difficult is it balancing gameplay with power-ups?
The difficulty is, as you allude, as a game designer to balance the game for those people with power-ups and without, and all the degrees of partial power-ups in between. If you become totally invincible fully powered up or unable to progress without power-ups then the game isn't balanced right. You could make the game react to the player's level of power-ups, but that defeats the object of the exercise of gaining the power-up, so tempting, but not really viable. So you don't want the power-ups to be too wonderful, or if they are, they have to run out.

Shrink Ray

From: *Duke Nukem 3D*
Format: PC
Year: 1996
Created by: 3D Realms





The Shrink Ray fits beautifully into the ridiculous world of Duke Nukem. Aside from bosses, the powerful gun will reduce any enemy to microscopic size. The Duke then has 11 seconds to run over to them and grind them underfoot. It's particularly satisfying when used in multiplayer.

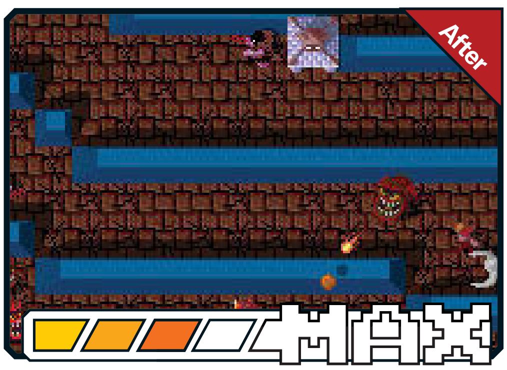
MAX

Bomb Potion

From: *Gauntlet*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1985
Created by: Atari Games



It's fair to say you're a teensy bit outnumbered (even with three friends) in *Gauntlet*. It's the videogame equivalent of being the world's most hated man trying to escape a maze full of tabloid journalists. For this reason, the potion pick-up, which delivers damage to every enemy onscreen, can be a godsend. If we're sticking with the whole hated man analogy, it's like getting a temporary gag order.



MAX

Alucard Shield



From: *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*
Format: PlayStation
Year: 1997
Created by: Konami

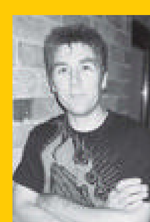


When combined with either the Shield Rod or Mablung Sword, the Alucard Shield becomes the most powerful weapon in *Symphony Of The Night*, capable of dishing out a staggering 255 hit damage per second to any unfortunate enemy it's used against. The only slight drawback is that the shield's power is temporary, with the 80 seconds of allotted time handily only depleting when it's being used. So powerful is it that you can vanquish Dracula in the time it takes to open and close a door seven to eight times. The power-up also appeared in *Castlevania Puzzle: Encore Of The Night* and *Harmony Of Despair*.

MAX



Images courtesy of Castlevania Dungeon.

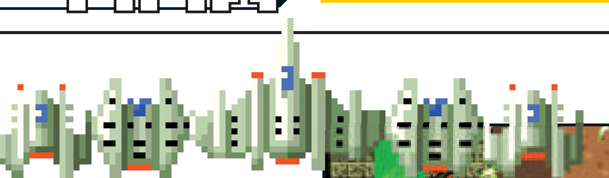


Simon Phipps, creator of Switchblade

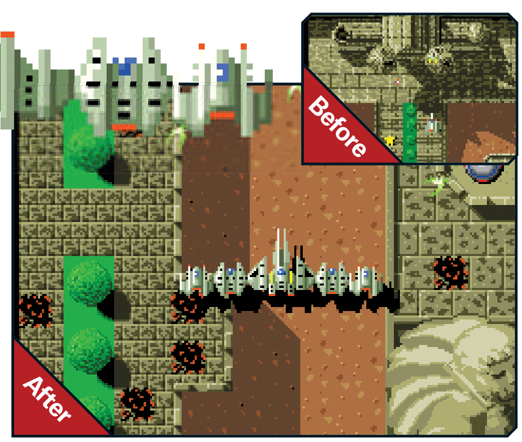
"The Docking Computer in *Elite*. Although not technically a 'power-up' in the traditional sense, it gets my vote. To earn it, you'd had to master the art of flying and docking your ship manually…"

Full Wing

From: *Slap Fight*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1986
Created by: Toaplan



Of the choice of power-ups/weapons you can select, the best is Wing. Adding two drones that sit obediently by your craft's side, they increase the rate and power of its fire. A further two units can also be equipped. To experience the joy of this power-up there's a cunning cheat you can employ. Start the game and don't move your ship, purposely get killed and when you restart it will be fitted with a full set of wings.



MAX

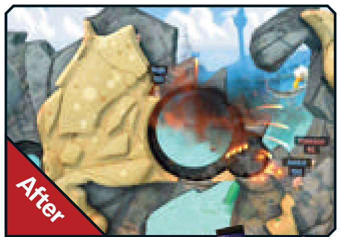
Holy Hand Grenade



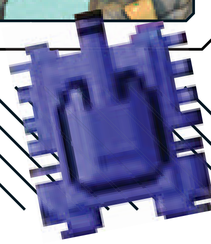
From: *Worms*
Format: PC
Year: 1995
Created by: Team 17

Holy Hand Grenades, a creation of Monty Python, have appeared in several videogame franchises, from *Duke Nukem* to *The Bard's Tale*. The most famous incarnation of the weapon though is found in the *Worms* series. In the games the weapon acts like a regular hand grenade, but one that resembles The Sovereign's Orb. It has a three-second timer and plays a snippet of *Hallelujah* when thrown. There are wackier weapons in the franchise, but the Holy Hand Grenade is one of the more memorable staples.





Tank







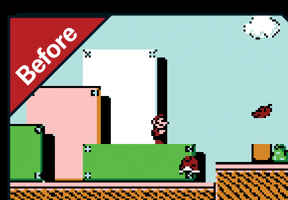
From: *Ikari Warriors*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1986
Created by: SNK

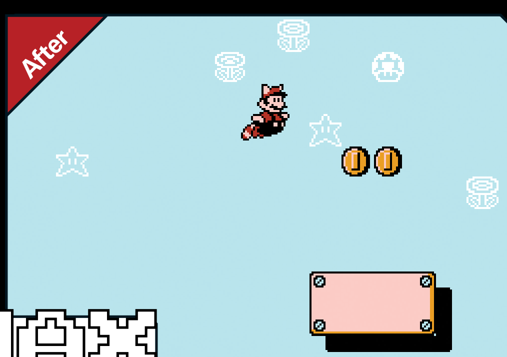
Is it us or did there never seem to be enough tanks for Ralph and Clark in the home conversions of *Ikari Warriors*? The tank was an awesome but cruel power-up during a co-op *Ikari Warriors* game. Commandeering one made your character immune to bullets, so there was always a race to get it first. Although the vehicle wasn't safe from explosions, and had to be continually topped up with fuel, like all the best power-ups it was immensely satisfying, and a source of great amusement.

Super Leaf

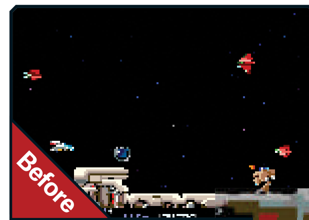
From: *Super Mario Bros. 3*
Format: NES
Year: 1988
Created by: Nintendo

Super Mario Bros. 3 introduced a wardrobe of power-up suits for Mario and Luigi to wear. Among them are the Frog Suit, which allowed the brothers to access underwater warp pipes, the Hammer Suit that saw Mario relive his *Donkey Kong* days by arming him with hammers, and the Tanooki Suit – or, as we like to call it, the Japanese Raccoon Dog Suit, which gave them the power of flight and ability to turn into a stone statue to fool their enemies. The Power Leaf, however, is *SMB3*'s most iconic and handy power-up. It made Mario and Luigi half raccoon, giving them pointy ears and a tail. Better than that though, the brothers could whack enemies with their tails, hang in the air, and, by filling up a run meter take to the skies. Like a raccoon.





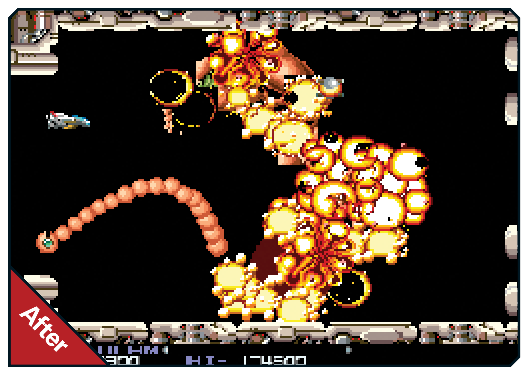
The Force



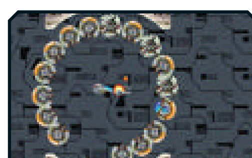


From: *R-Type*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1987
Created by: Irem

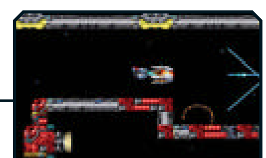
The Force is without a doubt the most famous power-up in the shoot-'em-up genre. Of alien origin, and described as an 'indescribable living weapon', it's just all sorts of clever. A defining and popular feature of *R-Type*, the Force has become a solid staple of the franchise. A powerful orb of energy, it can be levelled up to unleash a formidable amount of firepower and be described as part weapon, part drone and part shield. The Force's versatility and ability to destroy most standard enemy bullets and enemies it comes in contact with makes it incredibly useful. But that's not all as it can also be fired across the screen to hit enemies, and will hang there, mirroring the actions of your R-9A fighter, until it's called back like an obedient puppy. The best thing about the Force though is the fact it can be attached to either the front or back of the ship, allowing you to focus firepower where you need it most. So useful is it that the glum, punishing stages of *R-Type* feel a very intimidating place without it, and making effective use of its multitude of abilities really is the key to conquering the game.



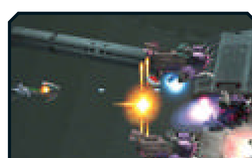
Evolution of a power-up



R-Type
Arcade, 1987



R-Type II
Arcade, 1989



R-Type Final
PS2, 2003



R-Type Delta
PlayStation, 1998



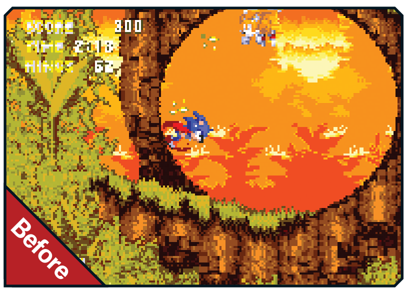
Chaos Emeralds

From: *Sonic The Hedgehog*
Format: Mega Drive
Year: 1991
Created by: Sega

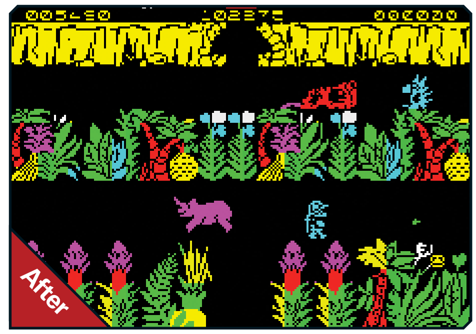
To 100 per cent a Sonic game you basically have to collect all of the Chaos Emeralds, which are typically garnered by successfully completing the bonus games. In the first *Sonic,* collecting the gems gave you a subtle alternative ending with some tall flowers to look at. Big whoop. For the sequel, though, Sega put far more thought into the benefits these seven precious gemstones had. Collecting them all in *Sonic 2*, and collecting 50 gold rings, transformed Sonic into Super Sonic. Making Sonic faster, able to jump higher and gold in colour, it was the most awesome thing to happen so far in a platformer.

Like most superheroes, Super Sonic wasn't completely invincible. He was still susceptible to crushing, drowning and falling off the face of the levels. But this just gave Sega the chance to introduce an even more powerful iteration of its mascot in Hyper Sonic, who was faster, stronger, and *could* breathe under water. One of the hardest unlockables in the whole series, Hyper Sonic is the most powerful version of Sonic (unless there's a God Sonic in *Sonic 4* we've yet to discover) and is distinguishable by his flashing colour, which mimics those of the seven Chaos Emeralds. Hyper Sonic has only properly appeared in *Sonic 3 And Knuckles* (there's a similar looking flashing Sonic in *Mario And Sonic At The Olympic Games*) and is unlocked by collecting the first set of seven Chaos Emeralds in *Sonic 3* as well as the second 'super' set in the Sonic And Knuckles segment.









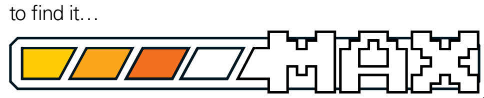
Orchids





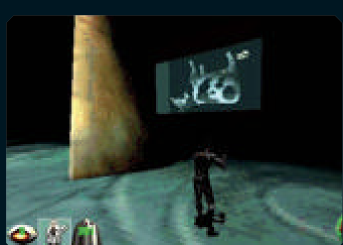
From: *Sabre Wulf*
Format: Spectrum
Year: 1984
Created by: Ultimate Play The Game

The five Orchids from *Sabre Wulf* are particularly interesting as they're one of the earliest examples of a power-up that will randomly affect you. As Sabre Man dashes around the labyrinth-like jungle, orchids will sprout up from predetermined places. The kicker here though is you have no idea what will actually sprout up. Blue granted speed, red offered immunity, while the yellow orchid caused sickness and the pink confusion orchid inverted your controls. You could rectify this by finding the white orchid (which cured you) but first you had to find it…



Power-downs

We looked at some of the best power-ups in videogames, but what about the worst?



World's Most Cowardly Power-up

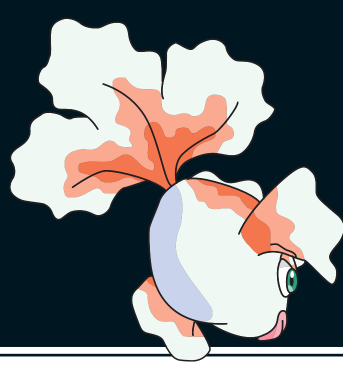
From: *MDK*

There are a number of amusing power-ups in Shiny's stylish and surreal third-person shooter, including The World's Most Interesting Bomb, which attracts curious enemies around it before exploding, and the Unknown Power-Up seen here, which drops a cow on an enemy. Our favourite though is probably World's Most Cowardly Power-Up, a health pack that sprouts legs and runs away from the player.

Goldeen

From: *Super Smash Bros.* series

Using the Goldeen is just like dropping a goldfish into a fight, almost literally. This water-loving Pokémon will just flap around on the ground and do little more than an Oscar-winning impression of a dying fish. It cannot be hurt, and cannot inflict damage. It's basically a joke, and a recurring one at that as it reprises its useless role in both *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and *Brawl*.





Poison Mushroom

From: *Super Mario Bros.* series

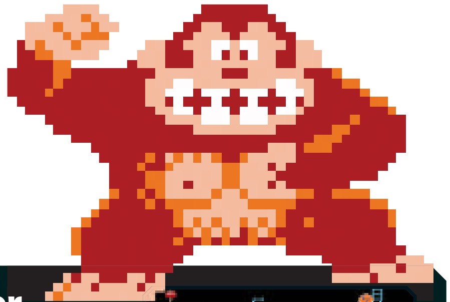
First appearing in the Japanese version of *Super Mario Bros. 2*, the poison mushroom was one of the ways that Nintendo made the game more challenging. We don't take issue with the item; more its look. Nearly indistinguishable from the growth mushroom (though later iterations are more distinct), players had to stare at the screen to see which mushroom it was, by which time they'd probably been killed by a Goomba.

Cloak Of Darkness

From: Wizards & Warriors

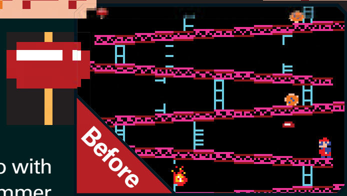
The award for the worst power-up ever has to go to this item here. Now an invisibility cloak sounds like a pretty great idea in theory. However, the execution of this particular one left a great deal to be desired. Making your knightly hero invisible to everyone except his enemies (read: you, basically), it easily ranks as one of the most odd, pointless and garbage power-ups in history. It's gaming's equivalent of a chocolate teapot.



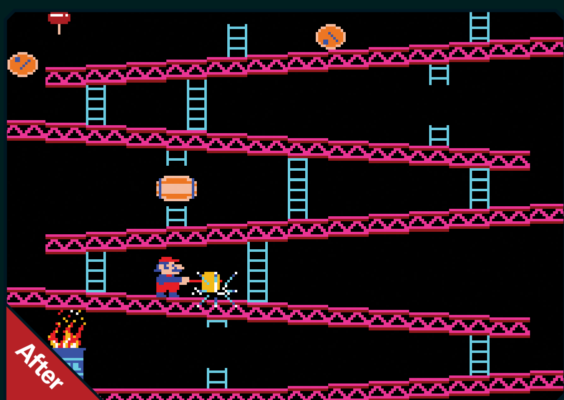


Hammer

From: *Donkey Kong*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1981
Created by: Nintendo



We were tempted to go with the *Gears Of War*'s Hammer Of Dawn, but as we obviously like to favour retro games here we've gone with the Hammer Of Donkey Kong instead. It's just as cool though, as it makes mild mannered Mario perform an uncharacteristic *Oldboy*-style frenzied hammer attack. The drawback of this power-up is the fact Mario cannot climb ladders with it and its usefulness is therefore pretty limited. It's still good for getting a few bonus points and clearing a path through those annoying barrels though.





Florent Gorges, games journalist

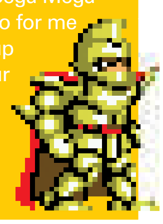


"My favourite power-up item is the big piece of meat in *PC-Genjin* for PC Engine. Bonk, the main character, is a prehistoric boy and he really seems to like meat! When he eats it he becomes really crazy. His head explodes and he becomes invincible. Hudson Soft's graphic artists did a great job of the character design and I can't help laughing when I see the screenshots of this little kid."

Colin Stewart, creator of Frank N Stein



"One of my all-time favourite games is *Ghouls'n Ghosts*, in particular the version on the Sega Mega Drive. So for me the ultimate power-up is the Golden Armour (with red cape) which seemed to me like the ultimate achievement!"





Q&A

Eugene Jarvis on what makes a good power-up

Why are power-ups important?
Power-ups are the gamenomic stimulus program that spices up the inevitable depressing deflationary doldrums caused by the repetitive same old, same olds. It's the silver bullet to kill the werewolf of boredom and predictability that sets in to the 99.99 per cent of all game designs that are non-brilliant. (*Tetris* didn't need any bleeding power-ups!)

What makes a great power-up?
A great power-up is a fantasy come true, a supernatural superpower that lays waste to the baddies. It is an aspirational faith healing miracle that works best when it takes your greatest vulnerability, and reflects it onto the enemies. Turning the tables into PAYBACK TIME.

What's the best power-up?
You gotta go with the granddaddy of them all – the *Pac-Man* Power Pill. Many have tried, but nobody has come close to that sucker in over 30 years. It's total payback time where the hunter becomes the hunted. The score doubling for eating Inky, Blinky & co. makes for a great risk reward, with super tension as the timer runs out and the part-time predator becomes the prey once again. It's like being Cinderella at midnight. Fantasy turns to nightmare again.

How difficult is it balance gameplay when you introduce power-ups?
Power-ups are like all artificial bullshit stimulus programs – you have to rob Peter to pay Paul. Somebody has to pay for the free lunch – and surprise, it's the player! Developers have to jack up the base difficulty to maintain competitive tension. Otherwise it becomes a walkover.



On Fire

From: *NBA Jam* **Format:** Arcade
Year: 1993 **Created by:** Midway



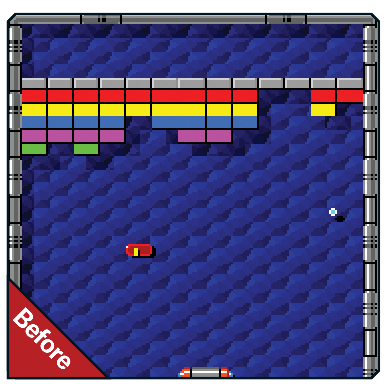
Usually, being on fire isn't a good thing. It's painful, annoying in the summer, and puts people off giving you hugs. If you're on fire in *NBA Jam* though, it's a great thing; it's a sign that one of your players has scored three successful dunks consecutively. Causing said player's accuracy and speed to improve, and the ball to generate a flame trail upon leaving their hands, it's an odd power-up in that it rewards you for already being good at the game by making you good at the game.

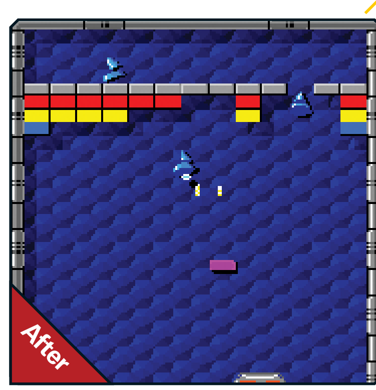


Laser

From: *Arkanoid* **Format:** Arcade **Year:** 1986 **Created by:** Taito

Breakout with power-ups, that's basically *Arkanoid*. In this classic game of wanton destructive vandalism (the virtual equivalent of breaking windows of a derelict skyscraper with a yoyo), a selection of neat powers were added to the gameplay that made life easier for the player. There's one that increases the size of the Vaus (your ship/paddle), and another that dropped multiple balls into the playing field. For us though, the best power-up was the laser, as it allowed the Vaus to blast the board away and made you feel slightly more a master of your own destiny. It's also incredibly handy for taking down that pesky final tile.







Q&A

Michael Welch on creating great and bad power-ups

What's your favourite power-up?
The fully powered-up Multiple Shot in *Turrican*! When there are tons of enemies on the screen and you just can't target them all, a spread shot weapon gives you that feeling of safety that one powerful laser beam can never provide.

How hard was it creating power-ups for *Scorched Tanks*?
Every weapon in *Scorched Tanks* feels like a power-up. The overall goal is to give each weapon the ability to be useful in all situations. However, when you have in your inventory the perfect weapon for that perfect one-in-a-million situation, that's when the magic happens. Discovering and enabling those rare moments is the work of a lifetime.

What makes a great power-up?
When a game is amazingly difficult, your only hope is to find that one power-up that will save the day. I'm not overly impressed with power-ups that are easy or frequently given. The greatest power-up has to be rare, and attained at the absolute outer limits of your ability.

And what makes a bad power-up?
In my experience, the most dangerous kind of power-up is a power-down. Throwing a Shrink Paddle into *DX-Ball* is an unlucky but acceptable thing to happen during the game. But the Kill Paddle has earned me more than a few angry emails over the years. Some power-ups feel too unlucky, and that's no fun.

What's the most important thing to consider when creating power-ups?
Power-ups need to feel like a reward. Make sure that the player knows that through sheer will and a bit of luck, they earned that power-up. Like finding a suit of armour in *Ghosts 'N Goblins* when you are down to running around in your boxers. It's a second chance at the game without having to fail and restart. That's the best kind of power-up.







Gravity Gun

From: *Half-Life 2* **Format:** PC **Year:** 2004 **Created by:** Valve Corporation

Yes, yes, *Half-Life 2* is the greatest FPS in the world because of its believable characters, imaginative enemy designs and well written dialogue. In all honesty though, we all know the best thing about *Half-Life 2* is the Gravity Gun, which can be used to pick up and place all manner of objects, and launch them at speed at your enemies. The world is basically your ammo. Though we will point out that Gordon Freeman is able to manipulate objects from the outset, it isn't until he acquires the upgraded Gravity Gun that the potential of this mechanic comes to the fore. Allowing the player to pick up objects to create cover as well as explore areas they otherwise couldn't, it's an incredibly useful tool. In fact, it proved such a popular aspect that Valve later created an entire game based in the same universe and around a similar style of weapon. We are of course referring to the Portal Gun. We can't wait to see what weapon Valve has planned for its next *Half-Life* game. Our money's on a Time Machine Inter-Dimensional Gun, which when fired can send any object through time and space to kill enemies from games Valve has yet to create.



Plasma Beam



From: *Raiden II*
Format: Arcade
Year: 1995
Created by: Seibu Kaihatsu

More commonly known as the 'toothpaste laser' the Plasma Beam is an awesome weapon that shoots out a highly flexible beam from the front of your ship. Reaching the entire length of the screen it effortlessly locks on to any enemy in its path and begins doing damage to it. Picking up more Plasma Beam icons makes the beam even thicker and enhances its damage even further. Truly devastating.

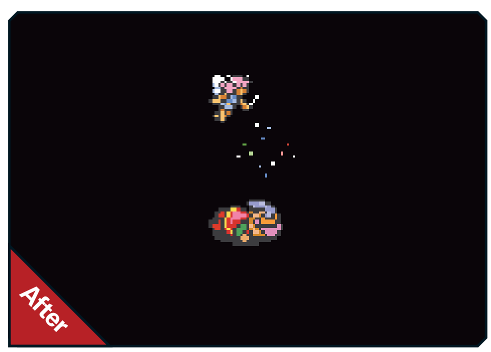


Fairy

From: *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*
Format: SNES
Year: 1991
Created by: Nintendo



Fairies have appeared in Zelda games since the franchise's beginnings on the NES and would typically restore all your health when you caught them. Link began to wise up to their magical uses, however, and soon discovered that storing a fairy in a bottle (which was first introduced in *A Link To The Past*) would bring you back to life after you fell in battle.

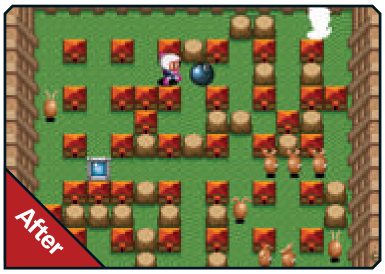


Bomb Kick

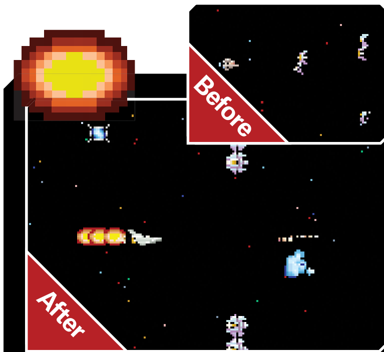


From: *Bomberman* **Format:** Super Nintendo
Year: 1993 **Created by:** Hudson Soft

In the deadly and explosive world of *Bomberman*, Bomb Kick is one of the most useful power-ups in the series, as it allows your little guy to punt away bombs by simply walking into them, sending them flying across the playing field in a straight line until they collide with a wall, bomb or another player. In some games in the series it's even possible to control the distance.



Option



From: *Gradius* **Format:** Arcade
Year: 1985 **Created by:** Konami

The power-up system in *Gradius* deserves a special mention. Rather than pick up a specific power-up, you instead collect energy orbs that move a selector between six different power-up options – comprising Speed Up, Missile, Double, Laser and Option (sometimes called Multiple) and a shield oddly dubbed ?. Option is by far the best of the bunch as it gave Vic Viper, your ship, an invincible drone that mimicked its attacks – and this includes any other additional power-ups the ship has equipped. Better yet, up to four could be fitted.

Power Stones

From: *Power Stone* **Format:** Arcade, Dreamcast **Year:** 1999 **Created by:** Capcom

It is understandable why this particular power-up is on the list; Power Stones are what make this superb 3D fighter from Capcom so entertaining. Collecting three of the mythical stones that get dropped randomly in to the fight will cause your characters to transform into a super powered up version of themselves, capable of making mincemeat of the other three fighters and performing a choice of super attacks. Power-ups in a one-on-one fighter are a rare sight, likely as they have the potential to unbalance the battle. Here though, they do no such thing as the power they offer is first come, first served – or should that be first come, last to get served?

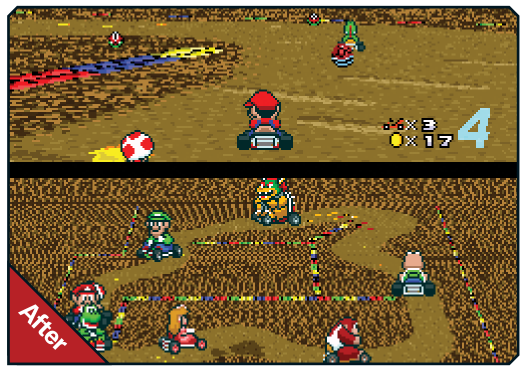


Red Shells

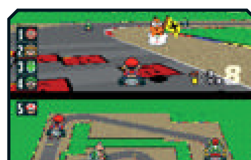


From: *Super Mario Kart*
Format: Super Nintendo
Year: 1992
Created by: Nintendo

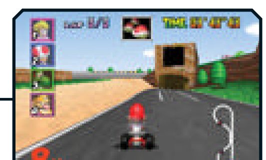
Does anything on this list match the smugness you feel when you drive over a power-up pad in *Super Mario Kart* and the game gives you a Red Shell or three? We'd argue no. If used right, this pick-up basically represents a free pass to climb one or three places on the race position table, while in multiplayer will cause your opponents to panic and break into a heavy sweat.



Evolution of a power-up



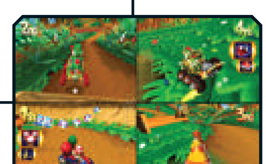
Super Mario Kart
SNES, 1992



Mario Kart 64
N64, 1996



Mario Kart Wii
Wii, 2008



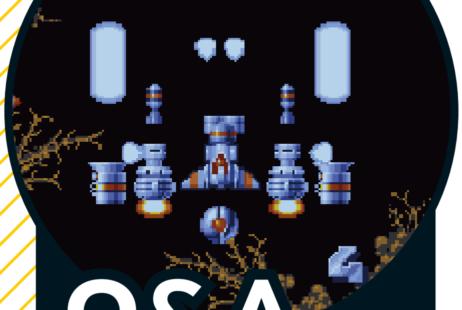
Mario Kart: Double Dash!
GameCube, 2003

John Romero, co-founder of id Software





"My favourite power-up is the Berzerk Pack in *Doom* and *Doom II*. It's super fun to run around and punch demons into piles of gibs. Even more fun in deathmatch if you can get someone in a corner – just a few pops and they're a meat pile! Makes for great laughs."



Q&A

Mike Montgomery on what makes a bad power-up

Why are power-ups important?
It's all about level progression and making the game more interesting. What would be the point of playing a game with the same weapons as the other side?

What makes a great power-up?
Well, two things I think: boosting your strength/power and adding pure fun. Look at *Armed And Dangerous* by Planet Moon Studios; the shark gun was just so funny.

What's the best power-up?
It must be the shark gun. I just wet myself with laughter!

How difficult is it to balance gameplay with power-ups?
This is one of the hardest things to do; the level progression needs to be just right. Get it wrong and the game is crap.

Where did the ideas for the power-ups in *Xenon 2* originate?
From the idea of coin-op arcade games, which get the punter to keep putting in coins, not only to get to the end but also to see what power-up comes next.



TOZ System

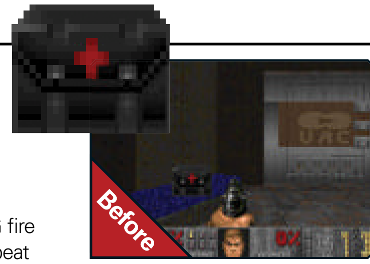


From: *Gaiares*
Format: Mega Drive
Year: 1990
Created by: Telenet Japan

This Mega Drive shooter never saw release on British shores, which is a shame as it's a stunning blaster, boasting big bosses and impressive parallax effects. The very best thing about *Gaiares* though is the TOZ system. One of the more original weapon systems to appear in a blaster at the time, it was a device that worked similarly to the Force in *R-Type*, in that it could be launched horizontally across the screen. However, upon coming in contact with an enemy it would inherit that enemy's weapon. Going a step further, it could be powered up by repeatedly reading the same weapon type. With 18 weapon types to choose from, there's a lot of depth to be found.

MAX

Berzerk Pack



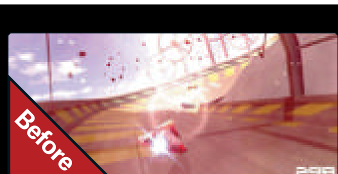
From: *Doom*
Format: PC
Year: 1993
Created by: id Software

Vaporising hell spawn via BFG fire is one thing, but nothing can beat smashing them into a red, messy pulp. Pick up the Berzerk pack in doom, and the stimulants found inside turn your space marine into a kind of Jack Nicholson, John McEnroe, Happy Gilmore anger cocktail. Increased aggression and strength, plus a full health boost, are yours upon collection of this power-up, with the damage you inflict raising by around 10 per cent. Doom's co-creator John Romero was a big fan of *Pac-Man*, and in a way we guess this can be seen as his homage to the game's famous Power Pellet.

MAX



Quake Disruptor



From: *WipEout 2097*
Format: PlayStation
Year: 1996
Created by: Psygnosis

Undoubtedly one of the coolest power-up of any racing game, since it was introduced in *WipEout 2097* the Quake Disruptor has become a popular staple of the *WipEout* series. Collecting this power-up during races gave you the power to send an undulating earthquake up the track. Leaving smashed crafts, disgruntled rivals and a big grin on your chops, visually and consequence-wise it was an incredibly gratifying weapon. One of the best things about this particular power-up, from a concentrating on the road perspective, was the fact you didn't have to aim it. Allowing you to focus on the race at hand, you just launched it and enjoyed the game-changing results.

MAX



'Power up!' orb



From: Altered Beast
Format: Arcade
Year: 1988
Created by: Sega

In *Altered Beast*, collecting power-ups isn't a choice but an absolute necessity. Without smashing apart enough of those jumping two-headed dog creatures and harvesting the orbs they drop, you would be unable to gradually transform into each stage's beast form and get an audience with its boss. Power-ups are the bread, butter and plate of *Altered Beast*. Remove them and you're left with a pretty dull side-scrolling brawler, one starring a man with the most peculiar fighting style and tiniest head in gaming history.

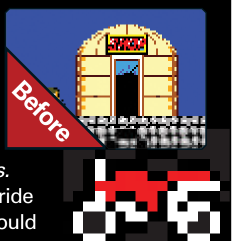
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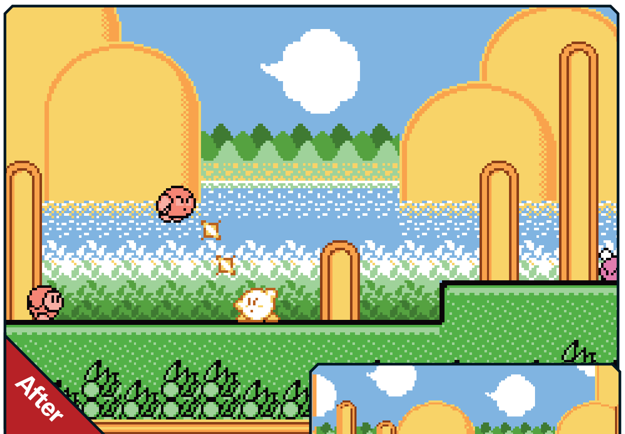
Motorbike

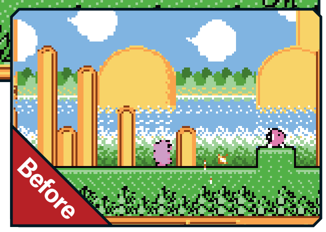
From: *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*
Format: Sega Master System
Year: 1986
Created by: Sega



One of the things that made *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* slightly cooler than *Super Mario Bros.* was the fact you ride vehicles. Mario could turn into a bigger version of himself, but Alex could drive a little red motorcycle around like Kaneda in *Akira*. Mario could lob fireballs, but Alex could ride a speedboat around like Liv Tyler in that perfume advert, and a helicopter like an *X Factor* judge. *AKIMW* showed Alex as the pixelated playboy of 8-bit platformers. But these vehicle sections also provided fun moments, and showed Sega was cottoning on to applying speed to the genre long before *Sonic The Hedgehog*.







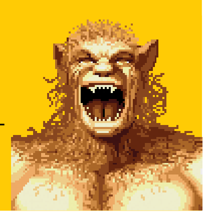
Any Enemy

From: Kirby's Adventure
Format: NES
Year: 1993
Created by: Hal Laboratory

Ah Kirby, one of the only videogame heroes we know who can turn anything into a power-up. By sucking up an enemy he gains abilities that can range from throwing a boomerang-like blade to a wheel that destroys anything in its path. Powers stay with Kirby until he either gets hit, decides to drop it, or swallows another enemy. As the franchise has progressed, more and more enemies have been introduced, which in turn has given Kirby even more creative power-ups.

Kurt Kalata, founder and editor of Hardcore Gaming 101





The transformations in *Altered Beast*. Grabbing orbs and being treated to those full screen man-beast transformations defined the Genesis.



Q&A

Jon Hare on the value of power-ups

What's your favourite power-up?
My favourite power-up of all time is the speed booster in *Mario Kart*.

How hard was it integrating the different power-ups into *Wizball*, and which do you think is the best?
It was really pretty easy, we only designed power-ups that were a natural fit for the game. I think the catellite is probably the best power-up in the game.

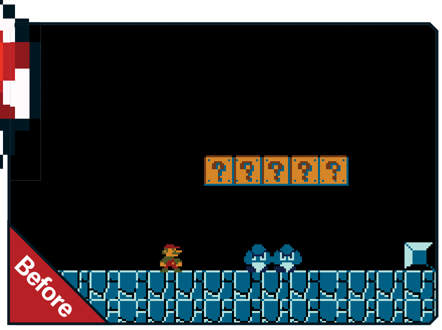
What do you feel power-ups add to games?
Well chosen, executed and balanced power-ups add variety and replayability to gameplay. They also allow the game designer to add more and more to a game without breaking its foundations.

Growth Mushroom



From: Super Mario Bros.
Format: NES
Year: 1985
Created by: Nintendo

Arguably the most iconic power-up, with a clear parallel to the size-altering food and drink in *Alice In Wonderland*, the spotted fungus is believed to have been inspired by folktales about people venturing into forests to eat mushrooms with magical properties. Scarfing down a red mushroom in *Super Mario Bros.* causes Mario to grow in size, able to smash bricks and sustain a hit from enemies. If he does receive a hit from an enemy he then reverts back to his original small, vulnerable state. Nintendo wanted to ensure everything in the game felt straightforward and simple (one of the reasons we surmise why enemies could be killed by simply stomping on their heads), and this power-up is a testament to that thinking too. It increases Mario's strength and defence, and changes him visually too.

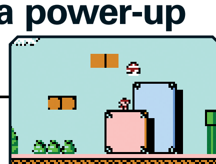




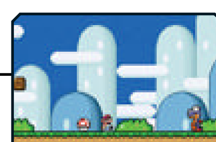
Evolution of a power-up



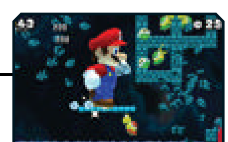
Super Mario Bros.
NES, 1985



Super Mario Bros. 3
NES, 1988



Super Mario World
SNES, 1990



New Super Mario Bros. 2
3DS, 2012

Kurt Kalata

This month, Stuart Hunt caught up with Kurt Kalata, the man behind the popular gaming website Hardcore Gaming 101



» Hardcore Gaming 101 has been around since 2004, and now contains hundreds of articles on classic and obscure games.

Who is Kurt Kalata?

Kurt is the founder and editor of the gaming website Hardcore Gaming 101, a site which has built up a solid reputation thanks to its in-depth features and reviews of classic and obscure games from passionate contributors. Recently turning his attention to book publishing, we caught up with Kurt to find out more.

HG101 is one of our favourite videogame sites on the web, can you tell us a little about its history and your involvement with it?
HG101 was an idea I had back in college about ten years ago, to cover game series as a whole, rather than individual game reviews, to give a broader look at retro games. Basically, they were meant to be mini fan-sites. I created The Castlevania Dungeon when I was in high school, and while I love the series, I also wanted less restrictions to cover a wider variety of subjects. Since then, Wikipedia has sort of filled that role, but HG101 still has a design and an editorial voice that separates it from wikis.

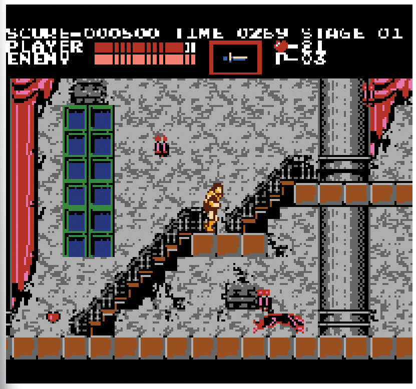


The site features a diverse mix of fascinating articles covering both obscure and classic games, how do you decide on the content and articles that appear?
For myself, it revolves around whatever I'm obsessed with at the moment. In this case, it's older Sega games, of course. Other than that, it's usually just whatever contributors pitch to me.

What is your favourite videogame and why, and which developer do you most admire, either modern or retro?
Castlevania Symphony Of The Night, I swear I've played it every year since its release and find something new about it. For developers, I've always admired Tim Schafer, for crawling up the corporate ladder, founding his own game studio, and attempting to find the sweet spot between games he wants to make and games that will sell.

Hardcore Gaming 101 has recently started to publish a series of retro gaming books, what was the motivation behind this?
Post-college I worked at a book store and was frustrated that the "Games" section was typically little more than strategy guides. That's sort of an embarrassing indictment of gaming culture and its history, so it's my small attempt to set things right. Of course, our books are still too small-press for major stores to carry, but it's the thought that counts, I suppose.

Specifically for the adventure game book, when I was a kid there was a summer I took a vacation to Maine, and I had one of those thick strategy guides that covered lots of adventure games. It was technically a guide book but it was still enjoyable to read. I wanted to emulate that experience, but with actual reviews.



» Kurt's latest book gives an in-depth analysis on Sega's classic franchises.



» Kurt is a huge *Castlevania* fan, and before Hardcore Gaming 101 created a fan site dedicated to the franchise.

What has the general reaction been like to your first book, *The Guide To Classic Graphic Adventures*?
Other than people disagreeing with some of the reviews, which was to be expected, the feedback has been largely positive. Every time someone tells me "Please write more books", it makes me happy.

Are you planning to release more *The Guide To...* books in the future?
In the format of the adventure game book, probably not. A 772 page book was a massive undertaking for a few people working in their spare time, and it was a nightmare to edit. The smaller format of the Sega book is more manageable, lets us put more effort into design, and also allows for affordable colour printing.

Your latest book *Sega Arcade Classics Vol. 1* has just been launched. Tell us about this particular book. How did the idea for it came about and has it been difficult to pull together?
I've been a Sega fanboy since I was five years old, so this is just me creating something I'd wanted to see since basically forever. It was challenging because I have no graphic design experience, so I had to learn on the fly. **Retro Gamer** has some amazing designers, so I studied many issues for inspiration! Also, my managing editor John Szczepaniak has more background than I, and he was a great help in getting me up to speed.

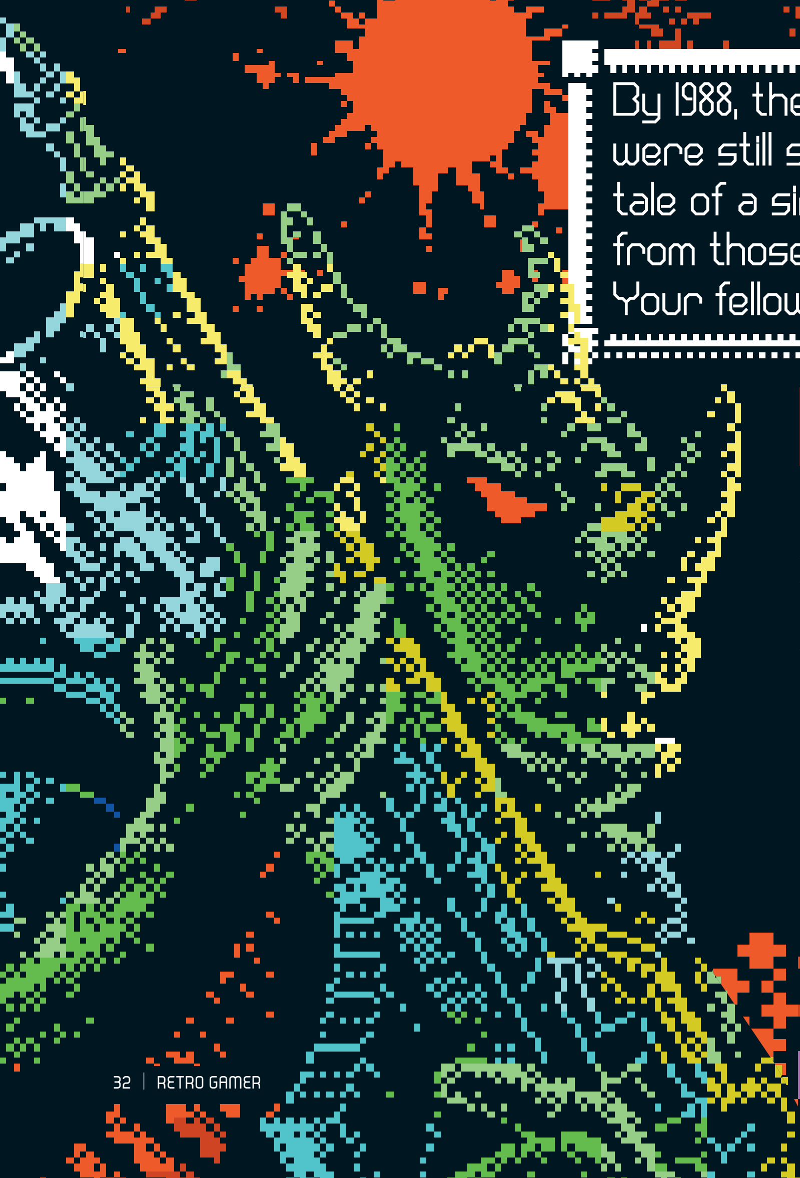
We're guessing you have more volumes in the pipeline, have you had time to plan the second volume yet?
Yup, the second volume will focus on earlier Sega arcade games, any more obscure games from late Eighties/early Nineties that couldn't fit in the first volume, and some more of the Master System. There are approximately seven volumes planned total. But, we will probably be focusing on a book on *Castlevania* first.

Are you still accepting contributors for the site? If so, what kind of writers are you looking for and how can they get involved?
Absolutely! Getting obsessive over obscure games is a must, as well as the ability to analyse more objectively than a typical review. The ability to read some Japanese is nice too, for searching that corner of the web. Plus being able to cohesively string sentences together certainly helps!


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THE MAKING OF REX

By 1988, the ZX Spectrum was on the wane, yet there were still some great games released, including this tale of a simple Rino-Sapien protecting the universe from those evil humans and their polluting factories. Your fellow bad guy, Graeme Mason, tells more. . .

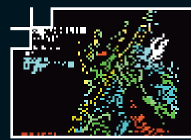


While researching this article, we struggled to find even a little information regarding the developers of Rex, the mysteriously named The Light. We discovered their names were John Anderson, Neil Harris and Richard Allan and some scant information on a nebulous previous employment at IBM, but that appeared to be it. The reason was simple: they don't exist.

"Our previous game, *The Fury*, got mixed reviews and sold poorly; we had a meeting with [publishers] Martech and I was pretty sure they were about to drop us. So we thought it would be a good time to show them our new demo," says John Anderson, real name Jas Austin and one-third of developer Creative Reality. Along with Neil Dodwell and Dave Dew, it had decided to try out a new tactic for its latest game in an attempt to erase any memories of its previous effort. Thus The Light was born. "I don't think there was any deep meaning in the names. I can't even remember why the other guys picked theirs. I simply chose mine because it had the same initials," mentions Jas. So that's the puzzle of the developers themselves out of the way – so what of this demo? "It was just a single screen with an unnamed character jumping and shooting the hell out of some stick men. We had nicknamed it *The Peeps Game* and it seemed to go down very well. I think it saved us," he concludes.

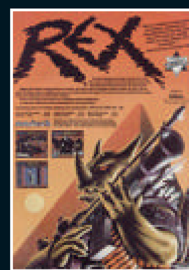
So with the basis of the game behind them, and their skins duly saved, Jas, Dave and Neil began developing the design for *The Peeps Game*. "I was


» [Spectrum] The two-way laser was a useful addition to Rex's armoury.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MARTECH GAMES LTD
» **DEVELOPER:** THE LIGHT
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM
» **GENRE:** ACTION



always coming up with crazy ideas," laughs Jas, "and at the time there were a lot of pollution issues around. Plus, deep down I'm a bit of a hippy, so the idea was probably a combination of a few things." The plot to *Rex* would be an interesting twist on the common mankind versus aliens story. Having ruined their own planet, homo sapiens are busy polluting the rest of the universe, specifically, the previously beautiful world of Zenith. Situated on this planet, belching out toxic fumes sits The Great Tower, a colossal testament to mankind's ability to destroy nature in the name of progress.

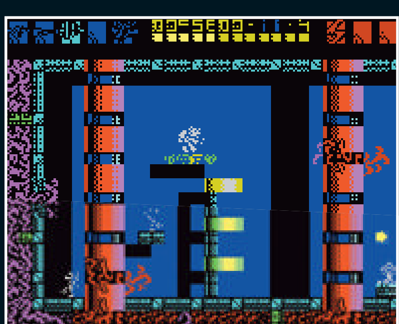
The tower is well-fortified, but fortunately the locals have clubbed together and hired Rino-Sapien uber-mercenary Rex to head on in and teach those ignorant humans a lesson or two. Armed with a formidable selection of guns, smart bombs and a shield, it's Rex's job to make his way through the human-infested underground cavern before taking on The Great Tower itself. Even for a tough nut like him, this is going to be a demanding gig.

> It wasn't really acceptable by this stage for games to have blatant colour clash
> JAS AUSTIN

Like many Spectrum fans, Jas was a huge fan of fellow programmer Raffaele Cecco. "*Exolon* and *Cybernoid*, in particular, were huge influences," he confirms, "and the *Dan Dare* games by Martin Wheeler were also a big inspiration for the graphic style, especially the tower section." Jas ponders on this for a moment before admitting they were pretty much a blatant copy of *Dan Dare*. "Ironically, I'd never met Martin Wheeler at the time, but years later ended up working with him on quite a few games," he notes.

With regards to the game's style, it was decided early on that *Rex* would be a full screen adventure; this meant, for the Spectrum version at least, that it would be flick screen rather than scrolling. "One of my earlier games, *W.A.R.*, was a downward scroller," says Jas, "and I had to have a tiny play area just to keep the frame-rate playable. That was the major drawback of the Spectrum: no hardware support for scrolling or sprites." Even with single non-scrolling screens, the team had a job keeping the frame-rate up, thanks to the huge number of sprites to include – especially as the game progressed and the player added more and more destructive weaponry to Rex's arsenal.

Another famous Spectrum foible Jas and Dave were keen to avoid was the dreaded colour clash. "It wasn't really acceptable by this stage for games to have blatant colour clash," recalls Jas, "so you either went monochrome or worked around it. Again, our solution was similar to *Dan Dare* and quite elegant; if you notice, all the sprites except for the odd explosion are kept to one colour, white. That enabled us to go to town on the backgrounds and make them as colourful as possible. We also did some clever block colours behind the player in the Tower level to give the impression of shadows. All very simple, but also very effective." Interestingly, at this relatively early stage, working title *The Peeps Game* had been jettisoned in favour of another name that would also soon be abandoned. "The first proper name we came up with for *Rex* ▶


» [Spectrum] Rex finally makes it to the base of the infamous tower.

DEMO MODE

The original release of *Rex* contained an unusual demonstration mode on side B, as Jas explains. "The idea was to create a non-playable intro of how Rex arrived at the tower, and we went one further by also including a demonstration of how to use the weapons in the game." This intro was essentially Jas playing a short section of the game over and over again until he got it right. "I had to complete that bit perfectly, so every time I messed it up I had to start again from the beginning. It took me ages, but I got pretty good at the game." Interestingly, the submarine that Rex arrives in at the beginning of the intro was loosely based on the Blitzspear ship from one of Creative Reality's previous games, *Nemesis The Warlock*.




» [Spectrum] The first boss near the end of the caves phase.

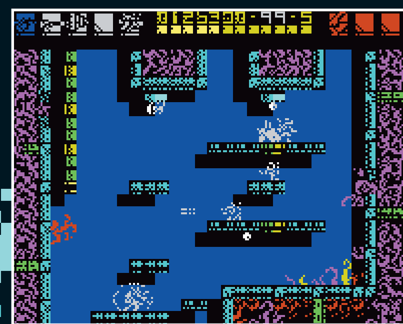
THE MAKING OF



» [Spectrum] The game over screen helpfully indicated how many humans Rex had iced.


» Jas Austin still works in the industry today.





▶ was *Zenith* after the planet the game takes place on," reveals Jas, "until we decided that thanks to the rather famous window company around at the time, it would probably be a very bad idea calling it that."

With Jas busy designing the levels, Dave Dew creating the sharp graphics and Neil Dodwell working on the Amstrad version, the newly-named *Rex* was starting to come together nicely. It was time for a touch of Eighties action cinema. "When it came to the gameplay, I wanted to create a deeper scoring system than normal and this came about through the multiplier," remembers Jas. This multi-recoil system, as influenced by over-the-top action movies such as *Commando* and *Predator*, meant you could carry on shooting enemies, suspending their jerking bodies in mid-air and hugely increasing your score. "It got you loads of points, and the bottom line was it was fun!" grins Jas.

Another idea, perhaps stemming from an early admission on how tough *Rex* was going to be to play, was a bubble shield that protected the horny devil from attacks. "I'm pretty sure the shield was there from the start, so I'm not sure if we actually had realised by then how difficult the game was going to be," states Jas, neatly contradicting our theory. "I remember it could be used as a kind of last ditch strategy where you could pile into a bunch of enemies. But if the shield ran out before they died, you were in big trouble." Nevertheless, Rex's shield, along with the frequent and conveniently placed beam pads that created re-spawn points within the framework of the plot, gave players some limited respite and added a strategic element to the game that was much appreciated upon release.

Rex took Creative Reality four months to complete. "I seem to recall most of the time was spent inputting all the level data, which must have been all done by hand. We certainly didn't have any kind of level editor," grimaces Jas. Generally, the team was very pleased with its efforts although there was a common issue towards the end of its development. "While we were happy with the boss at the end of the caves level, I would have liked to have had a much more impressive end to the game as the final boss at the top of the tower was pretty weak," admits Jas. "All you had to do was get in the right place and shoot it and that was it, as it didn't move or have any attacks. It was implemented right at the end of the development cycle so we simply ran out of time." The lack of time was also the reason for the rather odd end game message. Having inserted the droll words "With the big squidgy thing destroyed, Rex can go home and have a nice cup of tea and put his feet up" as a place holder early in development, the team didn't bother to change it. "We figured that it was quite amusing, plus we doubted many people would actually finish the game to see it!" quips Jas.

Upon release, *Rex* received unanimous praise. *Crash* magazine called it "a great mix of arcade/adventure and shoot-'em-up" and scored the game 82% while rival *Your Sinclair* reserved particular adulation for the multi-hit recoil system and weapon power-ups. The team were obviously delighted. "I think the look of the game really helped," notes Jas, "as although it may not have

> I guess looking back it was quite a difficult game. I like to think it was tough but fair
>
> JAS AUSTIN

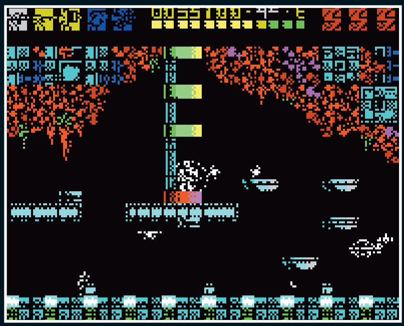


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

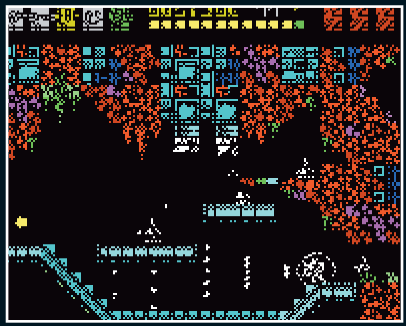
W.A.R.
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD
YEAR: 1986

NEMESIS THE WARLOCK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD
YEAR: 1987

DREAMWEB
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1994



» [Spectrum] Lifts were useful for navigating the large game area but could be hazardous.

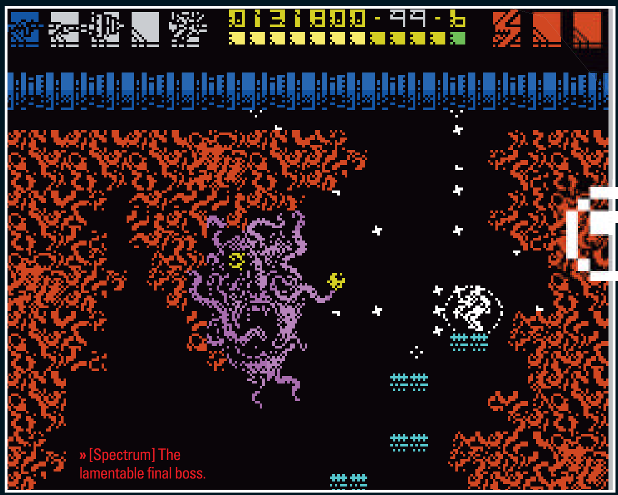


» [Spectrum] Collecting energy bubbles left behind by dead enemies meant Rex could upgrade to better weapons.

been a totally unique design, Dave did a fantastic job on the graphics, especially creating the colourful levels with very little colour clash. I also tried to keep the controls simple while including a decent amount of depth."

Despite the good reviews, there were minor criticisms of *Rex*, most notably the level of difficulty and its small graphics. "I guess looking back it was quite a difficult game, but I'd like to think it was tough but fair," responds Jas. "because as long as you took your time and planned your route carefully, it was quite straightforward. And of course, once fully tooled up, Rex was quite a hard bastard…" Another reason for the difficulty was the nature of play testing back in the Eighties; there were no outside play testers, or focus testing – it was all done by the team themselves, who of course became quite adept at the game as development went on. Jas acknowledges the graphics criticism but admits they had little choice; if they wanted multiple sprites on screen at once, each one with many frames of animation (including the various player weapons), the only way to do it was to keep the sprites small.

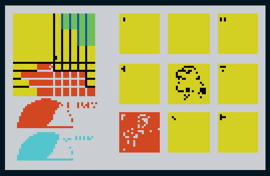
Creative Reality produced many impressive games during their time in the mid-late Eighties. We asked Jas how he thinks *Rex* stands in comparison. "I would say it was our best game by far as it certainly received the best reviews and seems to have stood the test of time better than our other games. I would also add that I really enjoyed working on it, as I did with all our games from that time. We always had a free reign over game design, often including the graphical style. These days you just don't get that freedom when working within a big team."



» [Spectrum] The lamentable final boss.

Rex proved to be Creative Reality's final 8-bit game. Jas Austin moved to Activision in 1989 where, during a brief stay, he produced the Spectrum arcade conversion of *Altered Beast*. Today he is a senior programmer and game designer at Origin8, the developer created by Jez San and Foo Katan in 2008. For regular updates on Origin8 and its games, follow Jas on twitter: @IamXERO.

FIVE OTHER ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE VIDEOGAMES



SURVIVAL (ZX SPECTRUM, 1984)

■ Modelling the natural world, *Survival* saw the player taking on the role of a chosen animal and learning the ropes of how to survive in the wild. Kids everywhere used it to demonstrate to their parents that their Spectrum *was* for educational purposes after all.



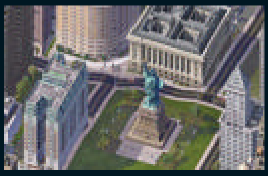
PARK PATROL (COMMODORE 64, 1984)

■ Controlling the splendidly-named Park Keeper, Percy Nuttling, it's the player's task to ensure the park is kept clean and safe for all users. Although we're not sure about the kicking ants bit. It's an entertaining little game that was also available on the Spectrum.



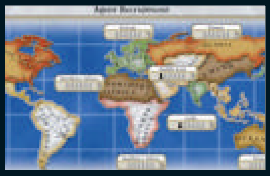
CAPTAIN PLANET (MEGA DRIVE, 1992)

■ The eponymous hero battles against three different enemies: Sly Sludge, Looten Plunder and Doctor Blight who are all about to destroy the Earth's environment in some nefarious way. Can Captain Planet save the rainforests? A decent adaptation of the cartoon.



SIM CITY 4 (PC, 2003)

■ The third in Maxis' popular series introduced an environmental aspect where players could replace power plants and factories with cleaner yet more expensive versions. *Sim City 5* is set to take the concept further with a global CO2 level that influences gameplay.



FATE OF THE WORLD (PC, 2011)

■ Perhaps the ultimate in environmentally aware computer games, *Fate Of The World* simulates the impact of global climate change. Your mission is to solve the ecological crisis or as the game itself asks: Will you help the planet or become an agent of destruction?



FROM THE
ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Special FX

The Special FX label may have lasted just five years, but the quality of its output was undeniable. Mike Bevan looks at the history of the software house behind Batman: The Caped Crusader, The Untouchables, and Midnight Resistance

Liverpool is a city with a world-renowned connection to the arts, culture and of course, music. But it is also a place of great importance to the British games software industry, as the startup location of a string of well-known companies including Imagine, original *Manic Miner* publisher Bug Byte, and Psygnosis. Alongside these influential Mersey-based software houses was Special FX, formed by legendary Spectrum coder Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith and Ocean co-founder Paul Finnegan, who sold his Ocean shares to start the company in 1987.

Artist Andy Rixon, a former employee at Tasket and Odin Computer Graphics, joined Special FX early in its formation. "As I remember, Paul and Joffa resigned from Ocean to go it alone," he says. "Special FX was a partnership of the two." The company's offices were originally very close to the birthplace of Liverpool's most famous cultural export. "When I started, Tony Pomfret was there and we worked at Cavern Walks in the centre of Liverpool," remembers artist Karen Davies, formerly of Ocean and Denton Designs. "The four of us were in one room and I remember we would work all morning on a game and then for lunch we would go the pub where Joffa and Tony would play computer games for fun, then we would go back to the office and work on games in the afternoon. Later on Andy and Robbie [Tinman] joined and we moved to the Albert Dock."

The Special FX family of programmers and artists soon began to feel like a 'who's who' of Brit game design talent, with ex-Ocean and ex-Imagine programmers Jim Bagley and Keith Robinson joining the team. "I was a Spectrum programmer, and when I started at Special FX there was another Spectrum programmer, none other than the famous Joffa Smith, so no pressure there," laughs Jim. "I joined the company as a programmer after leaving Odin Computer Graphics, and found it a great place to work," says Keith. "Paul Finnegan was a lovely guy to work for, and the whole team got on really well. I worked on multiple platforms, but majored on the Atari ST, and also developed the interface hardware and wrote the cross assemblers we used for writing the games."

"Paul was really the glue that kept everything together," remembers Keith. "He was calm, personable, one of the team, a smashing bloke, great to work for, and a real friend to all of us. He worked hard to make sure we succeeded as a team, and as a company." Jim recalls an example of the quick-thinking, can-do attitude of his former boss.

"I remember when I was doing *Hudson Hawk* for the Game Boy," he says. "We needed to check the Japanese translations, but none of us knew any Japanese, so Paul, being the gem he is, went outside the office, found some Japanese tourists, and got them to check over the in-game text on the Game Boy, to make sure there were no silly mistakes. I put their names into the high score table!"

"Joffa was an incredibly talented individual," Jim continues, praising his former colleague's skill with the Spectrum keyboard. "There are not many top notch programmers that are also top notch artists, yet he was, and it showed, and he was a fun-loving person too, there was always some of Joffa's humour in his games. When I joined Special FX, I was given

INSTANT EXPERT

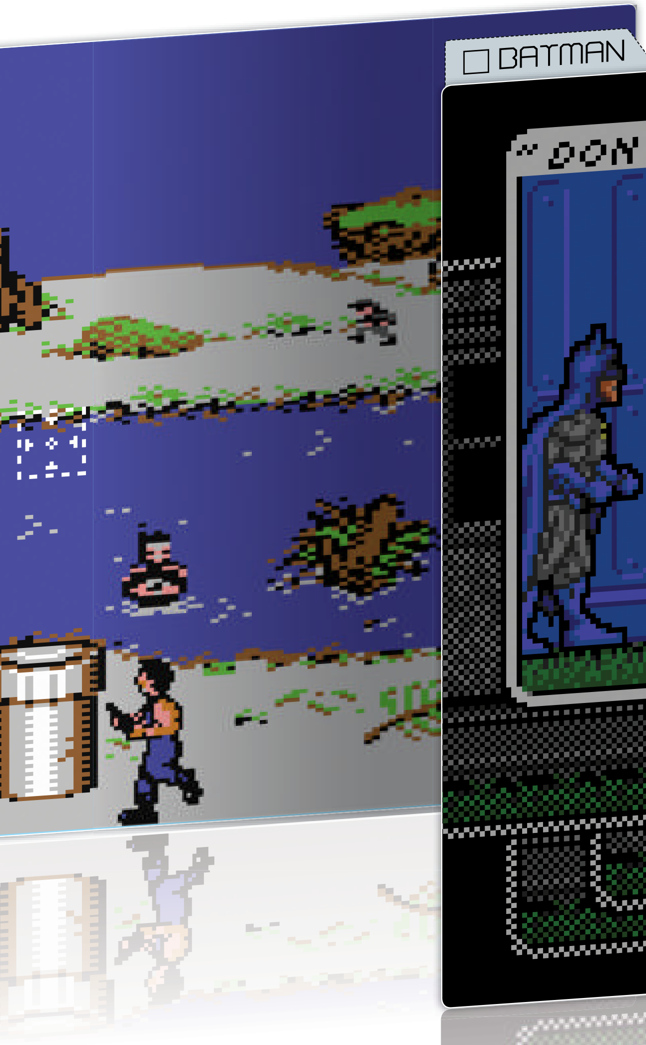
Liverpool-based developer Special FX was founded by ex-Ocean employees Paul Finnegan and Jonathan Smith.

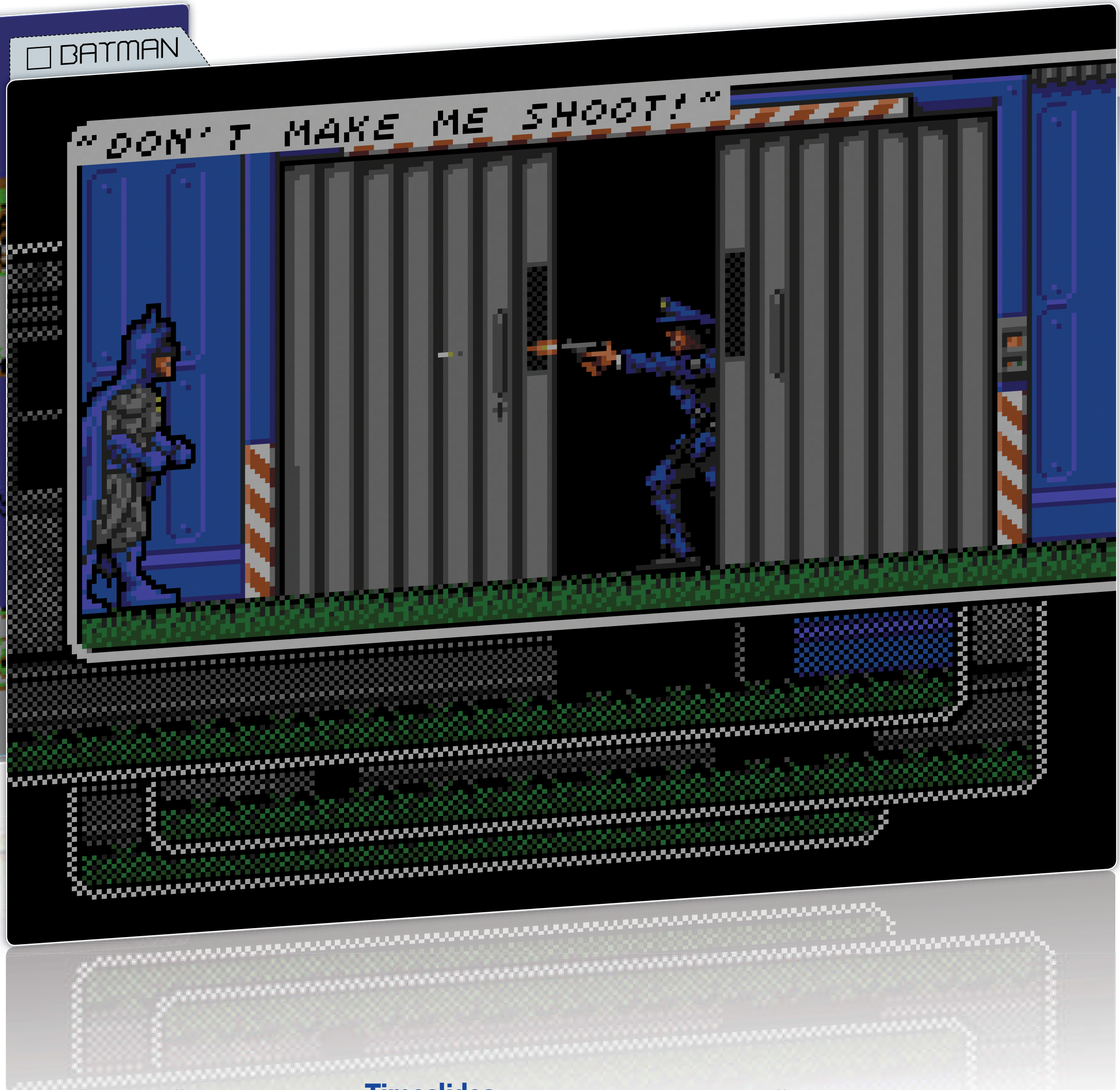
The company was highly regarded for its arcade and movie licenced games such as *Cabal*, *Midnight Resistance*, *The Untouchables* and *Robocop 2*.

Joffa Smith regarded *Firefly*, his second Special FX Spectrum title, as his favourite of all the games he programmed.

Special FX was known for its close relationship with Ocean software, which published all of its releases apart from *Hysteria*.

Most of its game artwork, as well as the company's logo, were designed by regular Ocean cover artist Bob Wakelin.





G.U.T.Z. to write, and Joffa showed me his legendary push screen scroller technique, like the one in *Cobra*, which I used for the maze sections of *G.U.T.Z.* Although he was a very shy person he would always share any of his knowledge, and instigate a lot of the fun that went on in the office."

> **"Paul was really the glue that kept everything together. He was calm, personable, a smashing bloke"**
>
> KEITH ROBINSON, SPECIAL FX PROGRAMMER

BY THE NUMBERS

3 The number of time zones in *Hysteria* (Ancient Greece, Dark Ages and Space.)

4 The number of employees at Special FX when it started in 1987.

6 The number of distinct game sections in *The Untouchables*.

7.34 The average user score across the Special FX games portfolio on the World of Spectrum website. Not bad at all…

9 The number of titles Special FX released for the Sinclair Spectrum.

92% The overall score *Firefly* and *Hudson Hawk* received in Crash magazine.

93% The overall score *Batman: The Caped Crusade*, *Midnight Resistance* and *Robocop 2* earned in Crash.

94% The score Crash gave *The Untouchables* overall.

£250,000 The amount that Ocean had to pay for the more in-demand movie-licences for some games, even back in 1989…

Timeslides

Although Special FX would become known for its close relationship with Ocean, who published titles such as *The Untouchables* and *Batman: The Caped Crusader*, its first game was released through a deal with another Liverpool-based software house, Software Projects, a company formed by *Manic Miner* creator Matt Smith after leaving Bug Byte. Originally christened *Time Warrior*, the game came to be known as *Hysteria*, the original C64 version being written by Tony Pomfret, with some excellent graphic design by Karen Davies. Joffa set to work converting the game to the Spectrum in two weeks, with the help of a parallax scrolling routine similar to ones he had put together for *Green Beret* and *Cobra*. For a first release it was an admirable and very playable effort, though the C64 version was better received than the slightly rushed Spectrum port. It would be the last Special FX game to be published by anyone other than Ocean in Europe.

Prior to *Hysteria*, Joffa had been working on an unusual Spectrum 128K game called *Angel*, which morphed into the acclaimed space shooter *Firefly*. "This game epitomised Joffa, and his approach to games," Keith comments. "It was fun, fast, simple in concept, and felt great to play. It was one of Joffa's favourites, and I think he hoped one day to put it onto other platforms." Tony Pomfret coded a C64 conversion, again with Karen on graphic duties; however, as *Hysteria* on the Commodore machine trumped the Speccy offering, Joffa's original version of *Firefly* was superior to the C64 port hands down.

Jim Bagley's first Spectrum offering, *G.U.T.Z.*, also took a fairly unique approach. "I think the story behind it was that a huge alien was coming to eat/destroy our planet," he says, "so you had to go into the 'gutz' of the alien, and destroy it from within, to save yourself, and our planet. I think there was some hint of *Fantastic Voyage* in there, although I'm not sure who made the storyline up."

Gunmen of the Apocalypse

While *Firefly* received rave reviews, *G.U.T.Z.* was criticized for being a wee bit too sprawling, receiving 62% overall in *Crash*, although Jim notes that nowadays, because of the unusual setting and eye-catching Bob Wakelin artwork it has become a well sought-after game for collectors. Jim's second Spectrum offering came courtesy of the deal with Ocean, whose financial clout meant that it could pass bigger arcade and ▶


» [Spectrum] Squeezing everything from the arcade into the Spectrum port of *Midnight Resistance* was an achievement.

> "It was a hard task to squeeze a big colourful arcade game onto the Spectrum, especially with the on-screen baddy count that it had"
> JIM BAGLEY, SPECIAL FX PROGRAMMER

movie licences on to the Special FX crew."I enjoyed writing *Cabal*," he says. "It was a hard task to squeeze a big colourful arcade game onto the Spectrum, especially with the huge on-screen baddy count that it had. Chas [Davies] did a fantastic job with the art, as he always did. *Cabal* is still a popular Spectrum game today, which I'm quite proud of."

"This was the first time I used underlay sprites," says Ivan Davies of his graphics work on the C64 version, coded by Robbie Tinman. "I loved the game and enjoyed doing the graphics for it. The two-player arcade mode was great but we couldn't do it on the home systems at the time." Both the C64 and Spectrum versions of *Cabal* were hits for Ocean and Special FX, and Jim can be rightly happy with the 91% rating it received in *Crash* following the reception of *G.U.T.Z.*

It was coming to the end of the Eighties and home computers were changing. 16-bit systems like the Amiga and Atari ST were replacing 8-bit stalwarts like the Spectrum and C64, and Joffa began work on what would be his final commercial Spectrum title, *Batman: The Caped Crusader*. The game is notable for its innovative display method, which integrates comic book style panels for successive in-game scenes in a manner later made famous by Sega's *Comix Zone*. "This was my favourite C64 game," declares Karen. "As I remember it was Joffa and Chas who came up with that idea, it made sense visually and could speed up processing time." *Batman* was another well received title, *Crash* awarding it a 93% overall score, and Special FX was on its way to becoming a highly-regarded software developer with gamers and press reviewers alike.

Docking Computer

With the move from Cavern Walks to Liverpool's Albert Dock, new staff were being hired to help convert titles to the new 16-bit platforms. Ian Moran joined in 1989 and was immediately put to work on the movie licence of Brian De Palma's Oscar winner *The Untouchables* on the Amiga. "The office was quite dark as you walked in and then it opened up into a large room where we all sat," Ian recalls. "Paul and Jof had their own offices but a lot of people use to hang out of Jof's window watching the world go by and discussing the game we were currently working on. We all had a large desk and the place was dotted with old arcade cases with games such as *Midnight Resistance*, *Cabal* and *Mr Do!*"

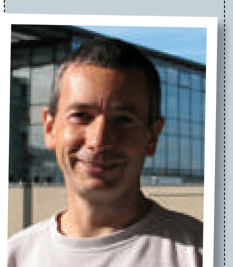
One of Special FX's most celebrated games, *The Untouchables* took the form of a selection of action mini-games, loosely following the film's plot, from 2D platform sections to *Cabal*-style shooting stages, and even a version of the notorious Chicago Union Station 'steps' sequence. "I seem to remember there being controversy over the baby in the pram going down the stairs," states Jim. "The Atari ST version was another collaboration between myself and Andy Rixon," says Keith. "The baby in a pram sequence was in the film, and we just had to get it in there."



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Jim Bagley
"I'm currently working as an indie developer/contract worker, I've also been working on some retro arcade games in my spare time, like *PacManicMinerMan*, (which was featured in **RG** Issue 105) and shown at the 2012 Play Expo in Manchester. I've also nearly finished *JetPacMan*, which is *JetPac* running on *Pac-Man* arcade hardware."



Keith Robinson
"I stayed in the games industry working for Rage and then Argonaut until 2002 after which I started exploring other software and IT related areas. Since then I've returned to the games industry a couple of times, but never really found a 'home' there, and am now in the web development business working for a small, fun, and talented web agency in London."



Ivan Davies
"I'm still in the industry after 23 years. After Special FX, I went on to Ocean, then they got bought by Infogrames. After Warthog, I went to Sony and I'm now running my own videogame production service company, Catalyst Outsourcing."

Karen Davies
"After Special FX I went on to Rage Software with some of the chaps from Special FX but left the industry in 1999 to be a full time mum."



Paul Finnegan
After winding up the Special FX label in 1992, Paul founded Rage Software. The company's ten-year stint in the industry saw it expanding throughout the Nineties beyond Liverpool to locations in Birmingham, Bristol and Sheffield, among others. Rage published such well known titles as *Striker*, *Incoming*, *Denki Blocks* and *Rocky*, before sadly folding in 2003. He is currently retired from the videogame industry.



STOKE ME A CLIPPER

Special FX was immortalized in sci-fi history due to a side-project for the BBC's popular *Red Dwarf* television series. "We were contacted by one of the producers to do some background graphics for some of the monitors on set," explains Andy Rixon. "I remember answering the phone and getting a shock… Joffa wrote the code to drive them and I knocked up the graphics. I believe it was done as a loop of images and animation on the Atari ST."

"If I remember correctly, they used our STs at the time too, as they were on a tight budget," says Jim. "Also, I think this was Joffa's first venture onto the ST." You can catch a glimpse of the team's creation on *Red Dwarf*'s flight deck in the second series.







» Liverpool's Albert Dock lies a stone's throw from the city's historic Liver Building.

TIMELINE

1987 SPECIAL FX IS FORMED BY PAUL FINNEGAN AND JONATHAN SMITH, ALONG WITH TONY POMFRET. KAREN DAVIES JOINS FROM DENTON DESIGNS. THE COMPANY'S FIRST TITLE HYSTERIA IS PUBLISHED.

1988 OCEAN POACHES SPECIAL FX FROM SOFTWARE PROJECTS. FIREFLY, G.U.T.Z. AND BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER RELEASED ON THE SPECTRUM AND C64.

1989 THE COMPANY'S FIRST 16-BIT RELEASE IS A PORT OF BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER FOR THE AMIGA AND ATARI ST. CABAL, THE UNTOUCHABLES AND RED HEAT ALSO HIT STORE SHELVES.

1990 A SECOND ARCADE CONVERSION, MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE, IS RELEASED, ALONG WITH MOVIE LICENCE ROBOCOP 2.

1991 HUDSON HAWK IS PUBLISHED. THE GAME IS CONSIDERABLY BETTER THAN THE MOVIE, ACCORDING TO JIM BAGLEY.

1992 JOFFA SMITH'S GAME BOY CONVERSION OF MR.DO! IS RELEASED BY OCEAN, BUT WITHOUT THE SPECIAL FX BRANDING. THE LABEL IS WOUND DOWN IN FAVOUR OF A NEW MONIKER – RAGE SOFTWARE.

"The Amiga hardware helped give us co-op play and smooth scrolling on *Midnight Resistance*," says Ian of his next project, a conversion of the Data East arcade game. "As with most Special FX titles I remember playing in a normally lit living room and thinking 'This is dark!' – I suspect a side effect of working in dark offices was that the titles were tuned for that environment."

"Most games back then were done to tight three-month schedules," explains Jim, who programmed the Spectrum version of *Midnight Resistance*, and the movie licence *Hudson Hawk*. "This didn't leave much time as some of that time was playing through the original arcade cabinet, to see what was in the game to then work out how to copy it, in the best way possible to home computers. Or watching a movie, and then trying to figure out what scenes to make into games…"

"On both *Cabal* and *Midnight Resistance*, Ocean sent over a briefcase with the arcade boards in it so we could play it, which we needed to play all the way through, so we could put as much as we could into our ports – thankfully it was free-play… We played them quite a bit to make sure we had it playing right and looking correct level-wise. Spectrum *Midnight Resistance* is one of the games I've written over the years that I'm most proud of, as the arcade was a *huge* game with lots of graphics, baddies, bullets and big maps, big baddies, and lots of colour. Chas and I managed to get it all in, even the cutscenes."

Bruce, Arnie and ED-209

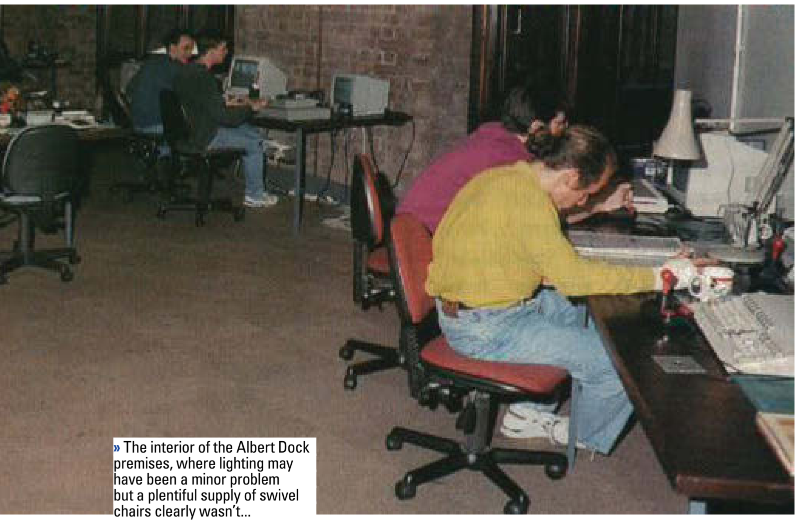
Hudson Hawk was an unusual choice for a project in hindsight, given the tanking of the film in cinemas, but the team is adamant that they made a decent stab at it under the circumstances. "It was a toss up between this and the film *Radio Flyer*. We had Bruce Willis, but I think both films flopped," says Ian. "The game was definitely better than the film," observes Jim. "We were supposed to see the film back in the day, but all we got as reference was the script, and I remember Bruce Willis being too vain, he didn't want his face ruined by the low-res graphics, so the artists had to do his face in caricature form." Karen adds, "I can remember us getting the script for this and thinking 'Oh my god', to put it nicely, but we tried to make a game out of it. When we submitted the first graphics we were asked to give Bruce Willis more hair…"

Joffa had moved on from the Spectrum to the Atari ST, coding versions of *Midnight Resistance*, *Hudson Hawk* and a licence of the Arnold Schwarzenegger action-movie *Red Heat*, which turned out to be one of the company's few misfires. "There wasn't a lot to the movie, so making a decent game from it was always going to be hard," Jim admits, regarding the Spectrum version. "Chas did some great graphics, and put caricatures of us all into one of the levels, which was in a hospital, so it needed people on beds. There wasn't much to the scrolling fighter, so a bunch of mini games were added also."

"This was a bit of an odd game as none of the characters have legs," says Karen, who worked on the Amiga and ST versions. "Again I think this was a Jof idea to help speed up the processing time while having large characters."







» The interior of the Albert Dock premises, where lighting may have been a minor problem but a plentiful supply of swivel chairs clearly wasn't…



» The Special FX team pose for *ST Action* magazine – left to right: Paul Finnegan, Jim Bagley, Ian Moran, Robbie Tinman, Keith Tinman, Frank Robinson, Keith Robinson, Chas Davies, Karen Davies, Ivan Davies.

"The game broke many joysticks with the 'crush the rock' level," chuckles Ivan. "I also loved the fact that if you collected a can of beer your character went much slower and all the colours flashed if you collected a syringe?!"

Much better was a licence based on the sci-fi movie sequel *RoboCop 2*. "A quick turn-around was needed for a multi-level game, three and half months I think," remembers Ian, who programmed the Amiga version. "Keith was handling the ST version, and his logic for the puzzle section was about the only thing that was ported directly from ST. That sounds pretty strange in this day and age, but back then development on ST and Amiga were handled independently, which actually worked nicely. We got to see the scripts and early edits of the movie."

"I ran out of time on this one," admits Keith, "so Joffa and Chas wrote the last level, which is why there is a style difference, but on the whole it worked out well, and I think that Joffa's level is one of the most enjoyable (and hardest) parts of the game."

Don't mention all of the ball fights…

And what of the 'special relationship' with publisher Ocean, was it as cosy as we'd imagine? "We saw a lot of Gary Bracey," says Keith, "as he was often in the office looking at the work we were doing, and discussing new projects."

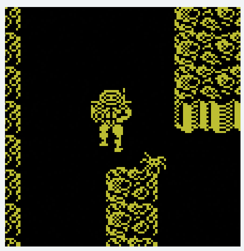
"I got on great with all the people at Ocean, not just all the programmers and artists, but the sales and marketing side too, still do to this day," says Jim. "I had quite a few trips to the Ocean offices in Manchester with Paul Finnegan." Ivan Davies cheekily admits that "whenever one of us went to Ocean, the mission was to come back with as much sway [sic] (games, t-shirts) as possible…"

Along with these little perks of the job it seems that camaraderie and an atmosphere of fun persisted through those days at the Dock for the Special FX team. "After work, if we weren't coding into the wee small hours we would often go to the Pump House pub next door and discuss programming, design, and the games we were writing over a few pints," Keith reminisces. "Sometimes we'd even go back to work after that if we'd hit on an idea that we couldn't wait to implement, or simply go for a curry so we could continue to put the world to rights. I remember doing beer and curry, and the odd club, on many a night with Joffa… What a talented guy he was, as were the whole team!"

"There were always people coming and going in the office," says Ivan. "The fax machine was always spitting out bugs reports, and brew rounds sometimes meant making everyone in the company a drink. The surrounding offices must have thought it was a mad-house in our office in the Albert Dock. I remember once walking back to the office and Jof and Chas had put my boxer shorts out of the window for all to see. I also remember that Jof had taken a pocket-sized dictionary and edited it with his own comments and definitions. Lots of laughs, lots of hangovers…"

"I remember the ball fights, how crazy were they?!" says Karen. We assume (and hope) you mean paper balls, Karen? "I can't remember who started them,

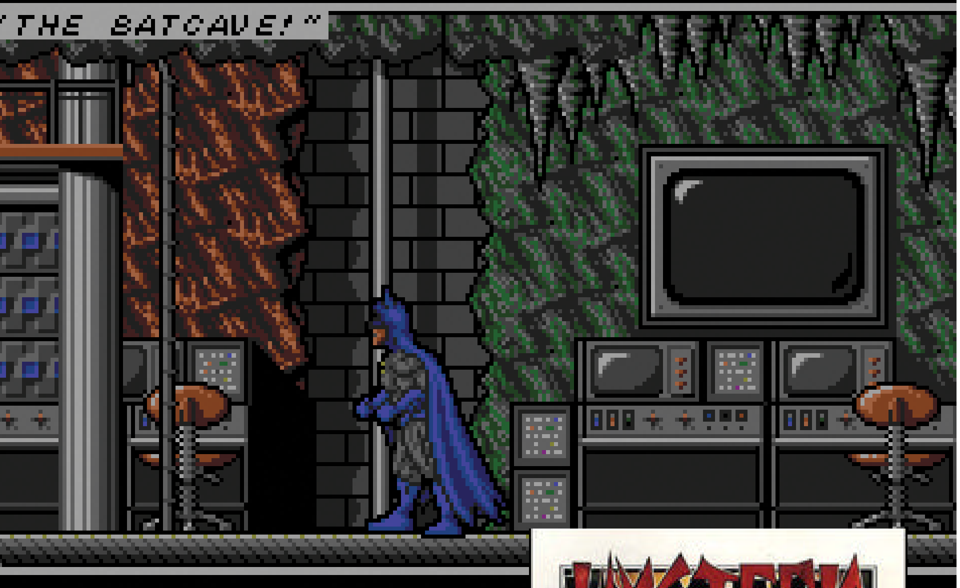
THE SPECIAL FX ENGINE

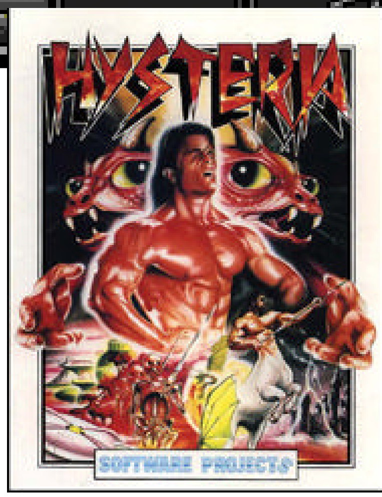


On the Spectrum, Joffa developed a technically advanced music engine which was used for all of the company's releases on the platform from *Firefly* and *G.U.T.Z.* onwards. The music for all the games was composed by Special FX musician Keith Tinman. Joffa's engine has far outlived its original purpose, being the basis for the 2010 Spectrum music utility Beepola, on which users from around the world have continued to create new 1-bit song tracks for the machine.









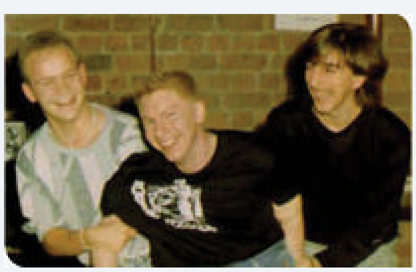
probably Joffa or Tony? I was not very good, what can I say? I throw like a girl…" Keith tells us that a certain Mr. Rixon became the office nemesis at this particular pastime. "Andy used to be an expert at making the balls, he took it to a whole new level, and I'm sure he put rocks in the middle of some of them too!"

Joffa's final project at Special FX, a conversion of the arcade game *Mr. Do!* for the Game Boy, draws praise from Jim. "Joffa's *Mr Do!* was awesome," he says. "I was and still am a big fan of the original, and it was a great conversion." "We had the arcade game in the office as well," says Ivan. "That's the one I remember playing the most." Unfortunately, by the time Ocean released the game in 1992, the Special FX logo had disappeared from its packaging. Paul Finnegan had re-established the studio as Rage Software, shifting production to consoles like the Mega Drive and SNES with titles like *Striker* and *Power Drive*. A victim of the label's demise was Keith Tinman's Spectrum conversion of *Toki*, which was advertised by Ocean in *Crash* but never released. It was the end of the road for the Special FX brand, and the start of a new chapter of games creation at Albert Dock, but that's one for another day.

"I have so many great memories of working at Special FX with such a great friendly bunch of people," says Jim fondly. "It may have been a dark place to work, and we worked late nights at crunch times, but it was always a pleasure to do so, because everyone made it a great atmosphere to work in. Special FX was and is by far the best place I've worked at, and I would do it all over again at the drop of a hat. I often wish the industry was like it was back then, fun times had whilst making our games, not worrying if your studio is going to be closed down, like many of the studios nowadays. The whole industry is changing and not for the good of the teams, unfortunately. I'm truly thankful to have been making games since the mid Eighties. I've seen a lot of change, met a lot of very creative people, and have loved every minute of it."

"The surrounding offices must have thought it was a mad house in our office" IVAN DAVIES, SPECIAL FX ARTIST

MEMORIES OF JOFFA



The unexpected loss of Jonathan Smith in June 2010 came as a shock to many in the retro gaming community. Regarded as one of the Spectrum's most gifted programmers, 'Jof' was behind many of Ocean's biggest hits on the machine, including *Terra Cresta*, *Cobra*, *Green Beret*, and *Hyper Sports*, before leaving to found Special FX in 1987.

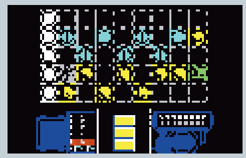
"Joffa was the type of person who would always make you smile," recalls Keith Robinson. "Not only could he code, but he could draw as well. He was a very innovative programmer and quick too. I think the Spectrum was far and away his favourite platform, and he knew how to get the best from it. You could always rely on him to get the job done, and to do it well."

"He was a great friend, a brilliant programmer, a fantastic designer and a very good artist," remembers Ivan Davies. Adds Karen, "He was a really nice person, when I first met him he was only young and shy, but he had a great sense of fun. He was brilliantly talented and a joy to be with, he is sadly missed."

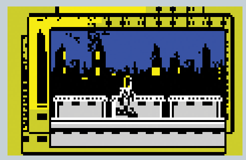
SIX OF THE BEST



Hysteria [1987]
Programmer Tony Pomfret cut his teeth at Ocean on C64 games like *Hunchback II* and *Mikie*, and this time-travelling action-adventure was his most polished offering to date. Although not a major seller, *Hysteria* has since become a cult classic.



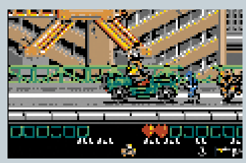
Firefly [1988]
This beautiful space shooter-cum-maze adventure was a prime example of Joffa Smith's technical genius on the Speccy, with its incredibly smooth movement, scrolling, and clever particle effects. This was also Joffa's favourite Spectrum title.



Batman: The Caped Crusader [1988]
This game was based on the classic Sixties TV series. Along with the neat graphical gimmick of cutting from each scene comic book style, it's an engrossing arcade-adventure with clever puzzles.



Cabal [1989]
The team's first arcade conversion is impressive on both the C64 and Spectrum. Oddly enough, the C64 received an alternative and rather shoddy port for the US market instead of Special FX's, which isn't a patch on this European offering.

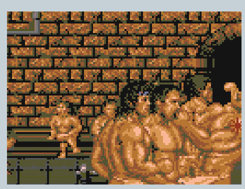


Midnight Resistance [1990]
Getting this game into the 8-bit systems was quite a feat, even if it had to resort to multi-load to do so. The 16-bit versions are obviously closer to the arcade game, with the Amiga version pipping Joffa's ST port due to the two-player co-op mode.



The Untouchables [1989]
Along with *Hudson Hawk* this ambitious title is probably Special FX's finest movie licence. Playing a brow-beaten Elliot Ness you take on the mob on your way to a showdown with Al Capone, facing six stages of platforming and shoot-outs.

ONE TO AVOID



Red Heat [1989]
This tepid scrolling beat-'em-up is notable for containing a naked Arnie fighting bad guys in a sauna in the opening, and only ever seeing the characters from the waist up. Joffa Smith, who programmed the Atari ST version, later admitted "It only took a few weeks… and it shows."



RETRO SHAMER

RETRO GAMES BEST LEFT IN THE PAST…

BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II



» [Master System] If you think the first stage is tough to beat, the final stage is said to be a bit like trying to perform late night brain surgery on a fly.

GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** MIRRORSOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** IMAGEWORKS
- » **GENRE:** SMS



» [Master System] If you hated *Back To The Future II* then you'll probably love this videogame.

As awesome as the *Back To The Future* films are, most videogames based on the franchise fall in at mediocre to dreadful. Most will often include some sort of monotonous hazard warning test section, putting players in the role Marty McFly as he is forced to negotiate a treacherous stretch of road littered with unimaginative obstacles, like removal men, oil spills and girls with hula hoops. This *Paperboy* style approach to adapting the movie franchise into a videogame does kind of make sense though, as some of the best action scenes from the films are those in which Marty is perched on a skateboard trying to escape goofy gang members.

Back To The Future Part II is another videogame that follows *Paperboy*'s skinny tyre rubber. It was a bad game across all formats, but the Sega Master System version is easily the worst of the bunch. *Back To The Future Part II* on the Sega Master System is so terrible it could probably persuade you to construct a time machine from fish guts, old dentures and dog sick, just so you could travel back in time to the exact moment you exchanged money for it and instead punch yourself forcefully in the throat.

Sight, sounds and gameplay, this port fails on all counts. In fact, at times it feels as if it was developed by two people working in entirely different parts of the world, without telephones. Case in point, during the first stage Marty has the option to throw a punch, but can he punch enemies? No. Marty also has an energy bar, but can he sustain more than a single hit? No. Instead, what this energy bar actually does is deplete, leaving you with the frustrating job of having to keep it topped up by collecting energy pick-ups from off the floor. We're still none the wiser as to what the punch action is



for – maybe it's not a punch, it's there to get Marty to remind the player which direction to travel in.

If the gameplay wasn't bad enough, the music and visuals are woeful too. The future depicted in the movie looked vibrant, colourful and a cool place to be. Here, were it not for a car that looks like a bicycle helmet whizzing past Marty seconds into the first stage, you'd be forgiven for thinking the game was set in 1992. Marty's hoverboard hovers about half a millimetre off the ground, is excruciatingly slow and horrible to control – resulting in frequent deaths. It was only thanks to the attract screen that we were able to glimpse at the other sections in the game.

They included a top-down stealth section in which you must rescue Marty's girlfriend from their future family home, and another where you must complete a tile puzzle of Marty playing his guitar – it's just a shame it's too complex a picture to construct within the pathetic 30 seconds of allotted time the game gives you. The smelly parting gift this conversion leaves you with is another of those terrible side-scrolling Hoverboard stages. While the developers can be commended for paying homage to key moments from the film, this still doesn't save this atrocity of a conversion.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED

PAPERBOY

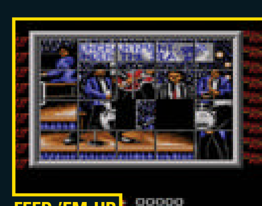
It's pretty obvious that Atari's popular newspaper delivery simulator was a big inspiration to the crux of *Back To The Future Part II*'s gameplay. Sadly, it's a poor and badly designed imitation of the arcade classic that has none of its charm, playability or enjoyment. Take our advice, stick to playing *Paperboy* (even if it has to be the Acorn Electron version) and watch the films to get your *Back To The Future* fix. Heck, even the *Neighbours* videogame is better than this tosh.



» THE POINTLESS PARTS



PUNCH-OUT!
Marty can throw a punch, but what this is actually for is unclear because he can't appear to hit enemies.



FEED-'EM-UP
If controlling Marty wasn't hard and frustrating enough, you have to keep his energy levels topped up too.

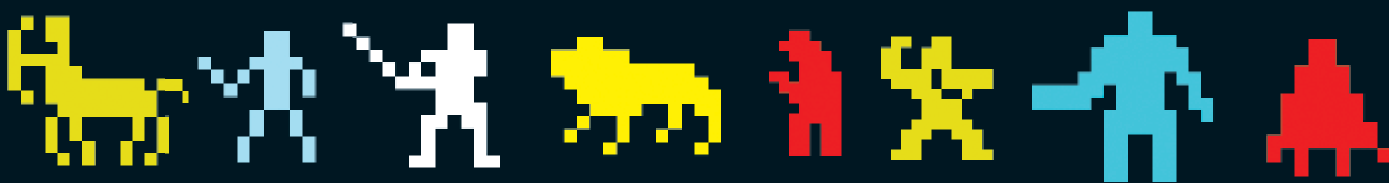


SLOW AND PAINFUL
Marty can only take a single hit. Combined with his incredibly sluggish movement, this game is stupidly difficult.

RETRO SHAMER RETRO SHAMER

THE KING OF CHAOS

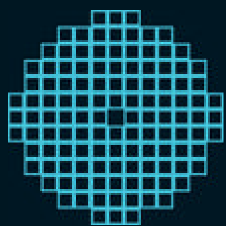
CHAOS IS IMPENDING. TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AFTER JULIAN GOLLOP CONJURED UP THE ORIGINAL GAME ON THE SPECTRUM, HE'S CURRENTLY SLAVING AWAY ON A BRAND NEW VERSION THAT'S PART REBOOT, PART SEQUEL. MARTYN CARROLL INTERRUPTS THE STRATEGY MASTER AT WORK TO TALK ABOUT ALL THINGS CHAOS

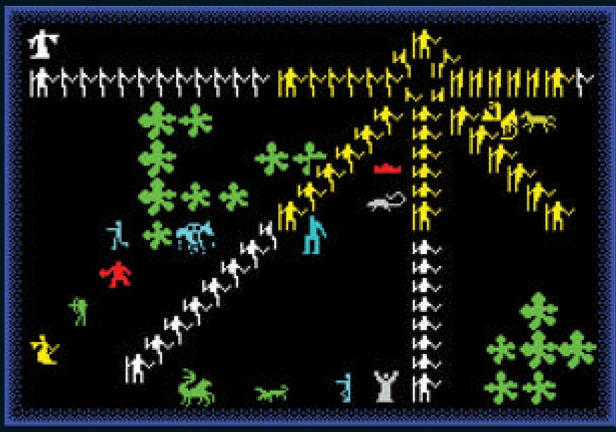


Last year barely a week went by without the announcement of some retro reboot or other, funded by a Kickstarter campaign or similar. So frequently have old IPs been pulled down from cobweb-covered shelves that of late many have been greeted with wearisome acceptance. "Oh *that's* coming back? I'd completely forgotten about it. Good, I guess?"

The same cannot be said about *Chaos Reborn*, the update of *Chaos* by its original author Julian Gollop. The game's existence, revealed in November, was greeted with much merriment. Excited fans were quick to post, tweet and blog about the announcement, and while it wasn't what you'd call widespread celebration, it was certainly *loud*. For those that had spent an inordinate amount of time in their youth battling rival wizards on the plane of Limbo, and resumed combat in the 1990 sequel *Lords Of Chaos*, this news was something to really shout about. Their voices may have been drowned out by the subsequent reveal of *Elite: Dangerous*, but the future release of *Chaos Reborn* remains an eagerly anticipated event regardless.

To an outsider the appeal of the original *Chaos* must be rather baffling. It's certainly not the sort of game you can sell by showing screenshots. The game begins with a large empty space and up to eight tiny wizards positioned around the perimeter. Things don't really improve as the battle commences, as the screen becomes swamped with all manner of pulsing objects, creatures and magic 'things'. It's reminiscent of an early website where the creator has gone crazy with animated GIFs.





But behind the crude presentation lies a deceptively sophisticated and engrossing game. *Chaos* features a variety of different spells, including direct attacks which you can launch against a rival and creatures which you can summon and command to battle on your behalf. And those are just the common everyday spells. Crucially, every player is assigned a random selection of spells, meaning that every game plays out differently – your tactics have to adapt to the spells you've been given. Brilliantly, even if you're presented with what may first appear to be a duff hand, the game is so well balanced that you can always make a decent fight of it.

Chaos possesses a huge amount of depth with all the different tactics you can employ, yet accessibility is never sacrificed; the game is surprisingly easy to pick up. This probably explains why the game has developed such a following over the years. *Chaos* was cover-mounted not once but twice on *Your Sinclair* magazine, so those that may have overlooked or disregarded the game previously were presented with a



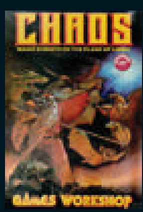
> **“I was really excited about the possibilities of computer game adaptations of my many board game ideas”**
> JULIAN GOLLOP

chance to play the game for ‘free’. As such the game’s fanbase has steadily grown.

However, the game’s crowning achievement has to be its multiplayer foundations. Playing against the computer is fun and works well, but it becomes peerless when human opponents are involved instead. Well-known writer Dan Whitehead is a massive fan of *Chaos* and its multiplayer battles. In his recent book *Speccy Nation* he writes: “Played solo, *Chaos* is still great fun, but the AI mind is easy to map. Played with eight humans, uncertainty enters the equation, and survival becomes a question of bluff and counter-bluff as you try to skew the game world in your favour.”

He continues: “*Chaos* is still capable of surprising the player... Yet its greatest trick has nothing to do with monsters and magic, but the way it creates an ever-changing, yet internally consistent, battlefield on which the player can write their own epic encounters.” An excellent description if ever we heard one. Like Dan, we look forward to writing whole new chapters when *Chaos Reborn* is released.

CHAOS THE BATTLE OF WIZARDS



"They wouldn't let me play it!" admits Julian Gollop – 'they' being some kids at school, while 'it' was *Warlock*, a board game from Games Workshop released in 1980. Despite knowing nothing about how the game actually played, Julian liked what he saw and was confident that he could not only recreate it but actually improve on it.

"I knew that the spells were on cards, which I thought was cool," he says, "but the game board seemed to have little function. The wizards just stood there in a circle slinging spells at each other in a highly abstract way. I thought it would be much better if you could summon creatures and move them around a board in a more tactical way. So during the next summer holidays I made my own battling wizards game which was heavily based on summoning all kinds of creatures."



» [Spectrum] Fight against each other, or co-operate with a friend and take on the CPU together.



The year was 1982 and *Chaos* was born as a board game. Julian drew the artwork himself – with his brother and sister helping to colour everything in – and he used his grandfather's typewriter to add text to the playing cards. Aside from *Warlock*, and the obvious influences of *Dungeons & Dragons* and Tolkien, he was inspired by the work of Michael Moorcock. "A major influence was the eternal conflict between law and chaos in Moorcock's Elric books. There was also a board game based on Elric in which spell casting affected the balance of the universe between Law and Chaos. I adapted this idea for my wizard card game."

Chaos soon became popular with Julian's family and friends. One close acquaintance from school even created a computer game version. "Andy Greene, who programmed *Time Lords*, my first computer game design, made a version of the game for the BBC Micro. It had to use text mode, so each creature was represented by a 2x2 block of letters. It wasn't very aesthetically pleasing, but it convinced me that a computer version of the game could work."

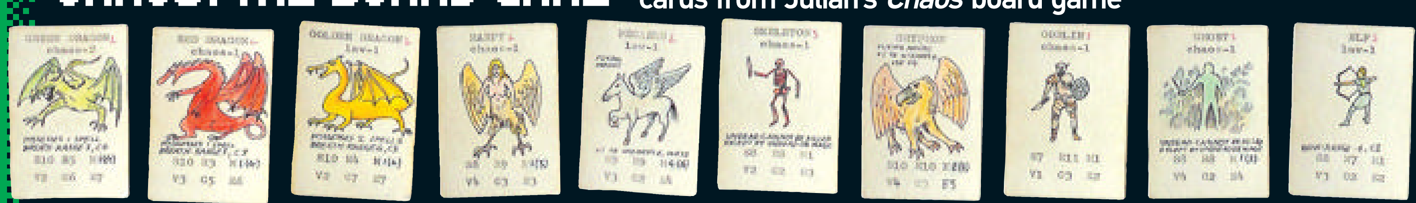
Although Julian didn't code his earliest game designs, he soon began to dabble in Sinclair BASIC and programmed two games for the Spectrum, *Nebula* and *Rebelstar Raiders*. Both titles were written entirely in BASIC and published by Red Shift in 1984. He then turned his attention to *Chaos*, his first full machine code title. "The development took nearly a year," he says, "but there was a gap in development caused by the collapse of Red Shift and also the fact that I started college. However, my Red Shift colleagues negotiated a deal with Games Workshop, so I finished the game while I was at college."

It was ironic then that a game loosely based on a Games Workshop idea should be published as an original title by Games Workshop itself. Released for the Spectrum in early 1985, *Chaos* garnered very good reviews with critics praising the game's impressive scope and its support for up to eight (that's eight!) players. "I'm not sure why I picked eight players as the maximum. I certainly never played with that many players with my board game version, although it was theoretically possible. I never felt it was too ambitious, but then I was young and naive."

Julian also reveals that the game went through very little play-testing prior to release. This resulted in some memorable bugs that players could use to their advantage (such as illusionary creatures becoming real if rescued from the Gooey Blob, and the Magic Wood spell placing three trees right next to each other if cast in the top left corner of the screen). None of these hidden 'features' were deliberate.

CHAOS: THE BOARD GAME

It's a real privilege to share these – the original cards from Julian's *Chaos* board game





» [Spectrum] Quick, nip into that Magic Wood and grab yourself a new spell.

"I'm not sure why I picked eight players. I never felt it was too ambitious, but then I was young and naive" JULIAN GOLLOP

"They were genuine bugs," he admits. "The game went through no QA process at all. But since it was based on the board game, which was played a lot, you could say it had some testing. However, there were some important differences with the computer game, particularly the ability to cast creatures as illusions – a mechanic not possible with the board game."

Ah, yes, casting illusions – the game's brilliant bluff feature. Should you 'disbelieve' that unlikely Golden Dragon or risk it being 'real'? "I introduced illusions because I thought that the bluff mechanic would add an extra dimension to the game – some human psychology with multiplayer games, and added tension and uncertainty. It seemed like a logical application of computer technology to me at the time, because it was not possible with the board game version, given that dice rolls were public, not hidden."

Such is Julian's enthusiasm for *Chaos*, it's not surprising to hear that it's his favourite creation. There are several reasons why: "It was based on my most successful and popular board game. I made many board games in those days, and although none were published I played the *Chaos* board game a lot with friends and family. It was also a major milestone in my programming skills, being my first pure Z80 assembly code project. I was really excited about the possibilities of computer game adaptations of my many board game ideas. Finally, I guess it's the game which stands out as being a fun multiplayer experience – a very pure game design."

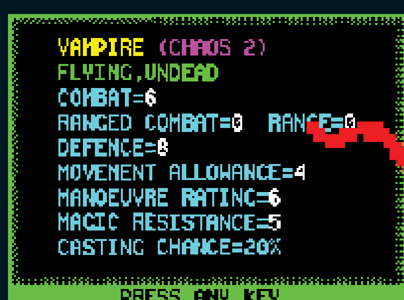


Despite the game's critical success – and Julian's fondness for it – *Chaos* remained exclusive to the Spectrum. "No other versions were planned," he says. "I had no idea how well the game sold, but Games Workshop withdrew from publishing computer games after its initial attempts. I decided to concentrate on my college work, but got bored pretty fast, so I decided to start on my own project, which then became *Rebelstar*."

Rebelstar was published in 1986 and Julian followed this with two more sci-fi-themed, squad-based titles in the shape of *Laser Squad* and *Rebelstar II*. But he was eager to revisit the world of *Chaos* and its ancient, warring wizards, and so following the release of *Rebelstar II* in 1989 he seized the opportunity to do just that.



» [Spectrum] Do you have the tactical guile to be the last wizard standing? Chaos by name and by nature.



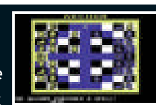
» [Spectrum] Let's make things a little more exciting by dropping a bloodsucker into the mix.

OTHER 8-BIT STRATEGY GAMES

A selection of strategy titles released around the same time as *Chaos*

ARCHON

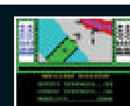
■ YEAR: 1983 ■ SYSTEM: ATARI 8-BIT, C64, VARIOUS



This spin on Chess is an enduring classic from the 8-bit era. Rather than simply taking squares, opposing pieces must battle it out in a combat arena. A fantastic title that was followed by a sequel and a number of updates and remakes.

STONKERS

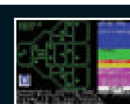
■ YEAR: 1984 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM



More than just a meme, *Stonkers* is one of the earliest examples of a real-time strategy game. You strike out against the enemy, ensuring that your units are well supplied. It's buggy and clumsy, but then we are talking an RTS, on the Spectrum, in 1983.

ALIEN

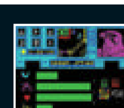
■ YEAR: 1984 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, CPC



It shouldn't really work, but this strategy game succeeds in replicating the tense, foreboding atmosphere of the movie. As commander of the Nostromo, you're called on to make critical decisions to save you and the crew from the slimy stowaway.

SHADOWFIRE

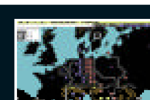
■ YEAR: 1985 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, CPC



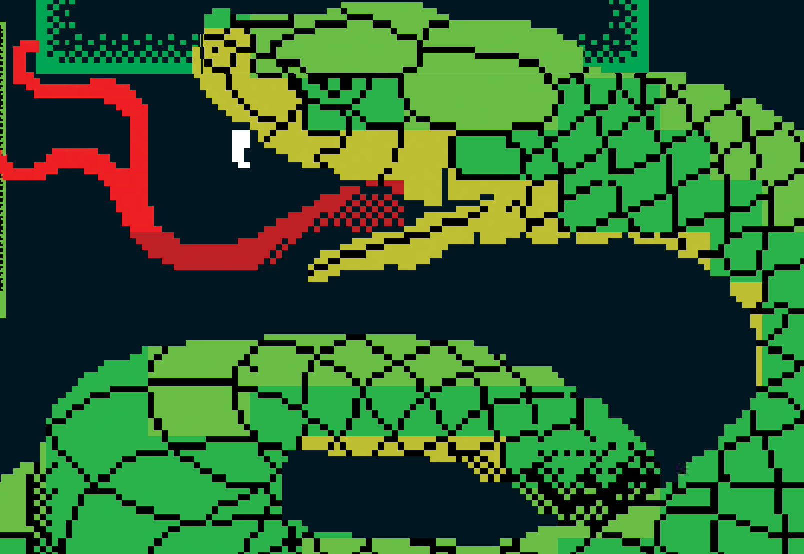
This distinctive game from the Dentons is not the kind of game you can slip into easily, but persevere and you'll be rewarded with a top strategy-adventure title. Success is all about utilising the strengths of your team members. Brainy and brilliant.

THEATRE EUROPE

■ YEAR: 1985 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, VARIOUS



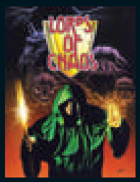
Or, that game where you had to phone a number to get the launch code for a nuclear strike. Of course, the point was to try and prevent the bombs going off. An absorbing simulation from the masters of the strategic war game, PSS.







LORD OF CHAOS



Before Target Games – the small development outfit Julian co-founded in 1988 – began to work on *Lords Of Chaos*, Firebird released the original *Chaos* on its Silver Range budget label. The game once again reviewed well, but its continued critical success and growing cult appeal had little to do with the decision to forge ahead with the follow-up. "*Lords Of Chaos* was just the kind of game I wanted to play, and therefore, to make," reveals Julian. "Generally I have always been guided by this principle. What game would I like to play that doesn't exist yet?"

In the case of *Chaos*, he also felt that there was scope to expand and enhance the gameplay. "*Chaos* had a lot of potential to be developed further. At that age I was still influenced by *Dungeons & Dragons* – I wanted to create more of an RPG experience with the wizard theme, and I wanted to make a game with a bit more depth. I liked the way the hidden units and the 'line of sight' system worked in *Laser Squad*. It created the tension of something unknown lurking around the corner. I wanted this for *Lords Of Chaos* too. This meant the maps had to be large and detailed with different types of terrain having different effects on movement and vision. I could also use 'invisibility' as an interesting attribute. The RPG thing is something I always wanted to do for a computer game, having played many pencil and paper RPGs. *Lords Of Chaos* was conceived as both a multiplayer experience and a single-player game with RPG elements. The ideas for the game were ambitious indeed."

To complicate matters further, the game was in development for a number of different platforms. "For the 8-bit versions of the game it was just myself and my brother Nick," he says, revealing that he programmed the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions while Nick handled coding duties on the Commodore 64. "This was quite a lot of work because we supported six SKUs – both disk and tape versions for the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad. We hired another programmer to help with the Atari ST version, which was really a significant reworking of the game. The Amiga version was then ported from the Atari ST by Krisalis software, which was a partner with our publisher, Blade Software." As with *Laser Squad*, an expansion pack featuring additional scenarios was later released.

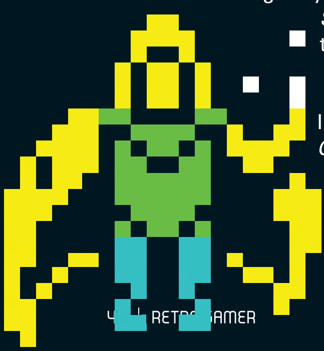


» Julian (left) and his brother Nick pictured in 1990 during the development of *Lords Of Chaos*.

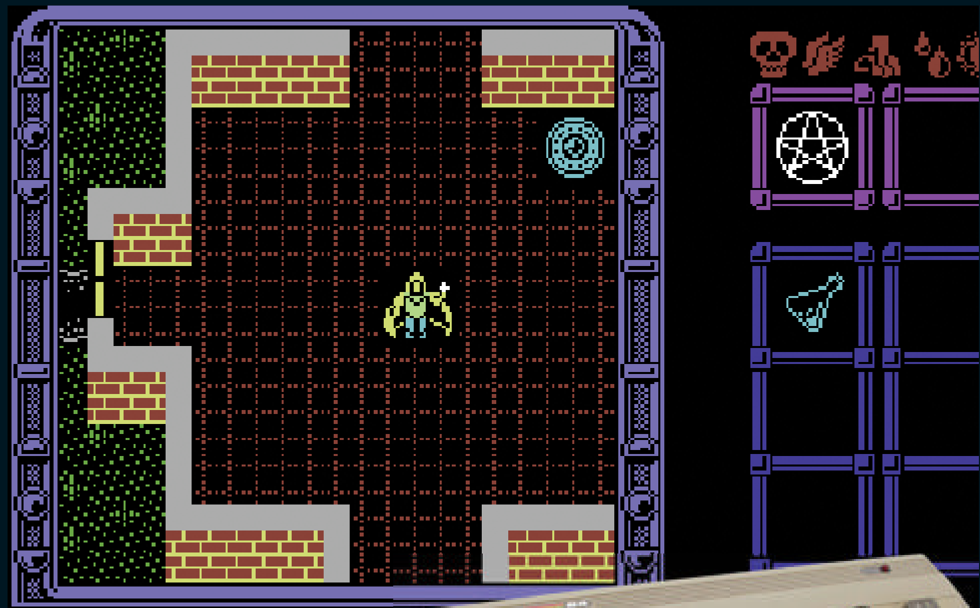
The 8-bit versions were completed in 1990 and bore the developer name Mythos Games rather than Target. Julian explains: "My original partner left Target Games, and the name of the company was his choice. Nick and I decided to create a new company, which he would join as director, with our own name and identity."

Mythos was formed and about to fledge, but all was not well at the game's publisher, Blade Software. Despite the game being finished, the release date kept slipping and the delay impacted on sales. "It didn't sell as well as we had hoped, especially as it was a much longer and more expensive

"Lords Of Chaos was conceived as both a multiplayer experience and a single-player game with RPG elements" JULIAN GOLLOP







» [C64] The excellent Commodore 64 version sizzled in *Zzap!64* with a 91% overall rating.

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY GEMS

Games that *Lords Of Chaos* competed with when it launched in 1990

FAMICOM WARS

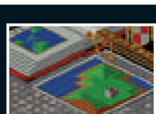
■ YEAR: 1988 ■ SYSTEM: FAMICOM



Advance Wars was an international smash when it appeared on the GBA in 2001, but over in Japan the *Wars* series stretches right back to this release for the Nintendo Famicom, an intriguing turn-based strategy.

POPULOUS

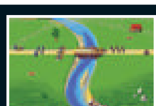
■ YEAR: 1989 ■ SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, VARIOUS



The original 'god game', or at least the one that defined the genre. Shape the land and watch your divine powers grow as the population worships you – providing you're a decent deity, of course. Omnipotence is jolly good fun.

NORTH & SOUTH

■ YEAR: 1989 ■ SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, VARIOUS



The American Civil War recreated as a turn-based strategy game interspersed with arcade-style sections (the battles are brilliant when played against a friend). Not particularly deep or sophisticated, but packed with imagination.

HERZOG ZWEI

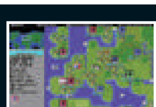
■ YEAR: 1990 ■ SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE



A Mega Drive game that was rather overlooked at the time of release but is now widely recognised as one of the most influential RTS titles. Westwood Studios cites this groundbreaking game as an inspiration for the popular *Dune II*.

CIVILIZATION

■ YEAR: 1991 ■ SYSTEM: PC, AMIGA, VARIOUS



The game that invited players to build an empire and steer it through thousands of years of development. Far more fascinating than any dull history lesson, *Civilization* was turn-based strategy honed to perfection and epic in scale.



development for us. There were problems with supply and distribution. A distributor once told me they had ordered a lot of copies but hadn't had any delivered. Our publisher was clearly having some financial problems, and it is quite likely the game didn't reach its full sales potential."

The Spectrum, C64 and CPC versions appeared towards the end of 1990, with the ST and Amiga releases arriving mid-1991. Reviews for the 8-bit versions were good, with scores falling around the 80-90% mark. The 16-bit release rated slightly lower, but was still respectable. "I was very happy with the game at the time," says Julian, who has since cast a more critical eye over the sequel. "The pacing of multiplayer games in *Lords Of Chaos* was quite slow. I didn't feel that it worked so well as a multiplayer game. However, I was quite happy with it as a single-player experience, except that using the 'wizard designer' was a bit fiddly. The control scheme was certainly too fiddly, and I think the complexity of the game meant that it really needed a different approach."

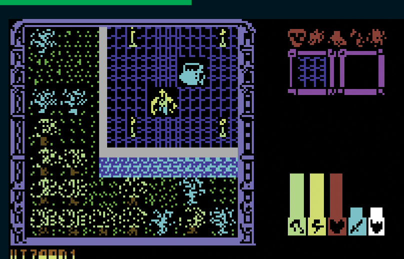
Lords Of Chaos was the last game Julian developed for the old Z80 stalwarts before choosing to focus on the PC. "I wasn't sad to leave the 8-bit computers behind at the time," he says, "but we were a bit lost for direction for a while. The next thing we made was a demo for *Laser Squad 2* on the Atari ST, which ultimately became *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. Wisely, we made the switch to the PC as soon as we could. Now I look back fondly on my days with the Spectrum, because it was such an amazing machine for its time. Almost everything had to be programmed from scratch – it didn't have all the hardware bells and whistles that the C64 had. It was a blank canvas, the best thing for a good artist."

Mythos would make its name with *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, the first title in the worldwide smash-hit *X-COM* series, still going strong today. Yet in 1998 Julian would again resurrect his duelling mages for *Magic & Mayhem*, a real-time strategy game that plays like a spiritual successor to Chaos. "*Magic & Mayhem* was intended to be something of a '*Chaos 3*'," he reveals. "The original design even featured the law and chaos balance from the original game, with the idea that if the balance shifted too far in one direction the terrain would suddenly change to reflect a state of total law or total chaos. However, the art team didn't feel they could do this, so the idea was dropped. It will make an appearance in *Chaos Reborn* though."

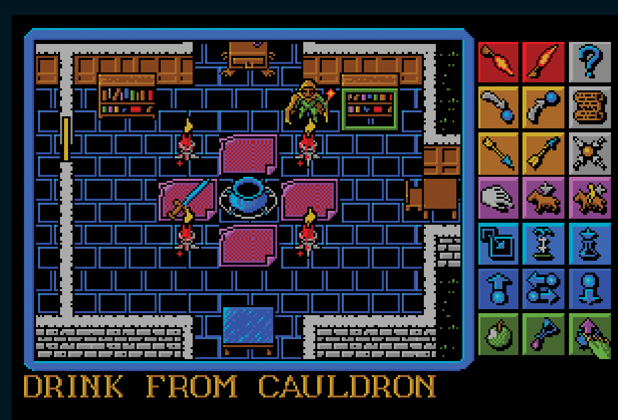
Which brings us very neatly to the project that Julian has been busy working on for the past few months…



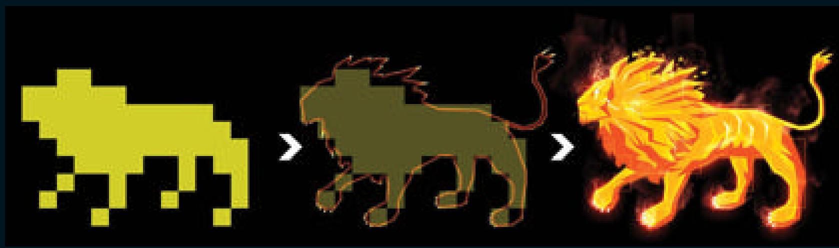
» [Spectrum] Starting out on the first scenario, 'The Many Coloured Land'.



» [CPC] *Amstrad Action* awarded the game a healthy 81% in its August 1990 issue.



» [Amiga] The 16-bit version introduced new features and improved graphics.



CHAOS REBORN

As Julian revealed in RG issue 110, *Chaos Reborn* will be a considered reworking of the original game. But of all the classic games he has created over the years, why revive *Chaos*? He says: "The reason I chose *Chaos* is mainly due to the many requests I have had over the years from people wanting to do their own remakes. The game has some unique characteristics that make it a great multiplayer experience, and I wanted to bring it up to date, enabling multiplayer over the internet."

As for new elements, he has already revealed that terrain and elevation will affect gameplay. "The terrain system will give extra variety to the battles," he elaborates. "The various terrain types, such as trees and ruins, will block movement and line of sight for creatures, so they present obstacles which can be a hindrance or a benefit depending on the tactical situation. The elevation system provides a way to create impassable 'cliff' sides, and affects combat. If a creature is attacking from a higher elevation, it gains a combat bonus, and if a creature is attacked from a lower elevation it gains a defence bonus."

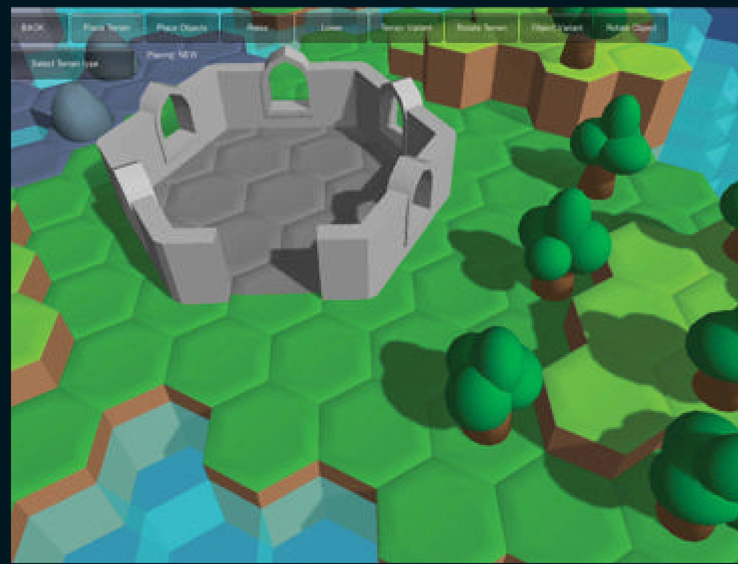
Naturally, the game will also come complete with a revised and expanded spell book. "There will certainly be a few new spells," he says, smiling. "And some of them quite dramatic. For example, 'Volcano' will cause the terrain to be thrust upwards, opening a vent that emits a rain of lethal magma. 'Tornado' will suck creatures up and fling them around the arena. There will be a better selection of direct attack spells, such as 'Chain Lightning' which attacks a series of creatures. Generally speaking, the more powerful spells carry some risk which could backfire on you, but this is the essence of chaos in the game."

Julian is very aware of the expectations of *Chaos* fans, in particular the need to carefully balance the fresh and the familiar. "This is a difficult balance," he admits. "Often people want a remake to recreate much the same experience as they had before but with higher production values. I am being careful to make sure that fans of the original will be able to recreate the classic multiplayer 'empty arena' experience of the original game. The essential game systems, such as combat, law/chaos, illusions and spell casting remain the same. The extensions I am adding to the game won't interfere with this."

Multiplayer aside, the chief new addition is a single-player adventure. This campaign mode is something Julian is relishing. "I have always been fascinated by the idea of 'game generators' which basically create environments and objectives algorithmically. I used this to some extent in the *X-COM* games, but I think it can go further. 'Kingdoms of Chaos' will be an epic adventure entirely generated according to a name invented by the player. This also allows players to exchange their game names and experiences. Also, I wanted to revisit *Lords Of Chaos* with its single-player RPG aspect, so there will definitely be something for *Lords Of Chaos* fans as well."

Chaos Reborn has already received a huge amount of interest from fans – something Julian is appreciative of. "I am very pleased about the response I have got so far to the game. It is a great motivator to get the project to the finishing line, even though it creates a burden of expectation. However, for me it's always more pleasing to be dealing directly with players as early as possible and getting their input, feedback and suggestions. This is a fun and productive way to do games development – something which you can't get when working for a big publisher or developer."

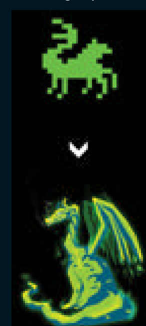
And with that we'll leave him in peace. Chaos is calling, after all. Visit www.gollopgames.com to find out how the game is progressing.



» Trees will act as obstacles but it's possible to destroy them using fire.



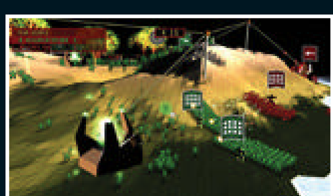
» "I am trying to keep the game platform agnostic," says Julian. "I want as many players to play the game on the device of their own choosing as possible."



> **"For me it's always pleasing to be dealing directly with players as early as possible and getting their input, feedback and suggestions"**
> JULIAN GOLLOP

MODERN STRATEGY HITS

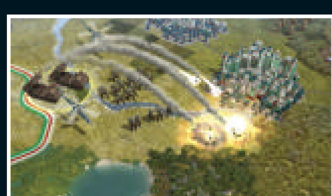
Both turn-based and real-time strategy titles are still very popular these days



DARWINIA+

■ YEAR: 2010 ■ SYSTEM: XBOX 360

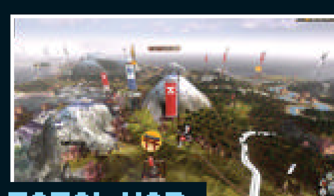
This Xbox Live release bundles Introversion's 2005 *Darwinia* and its successor *Multiwinia*. Although *Darwinia* features many unique qualities, it's not surprising to hear that *Chaos* influenced the early design.



CIVILIZATION V

■ YEAR: 2010 ■ SYSTEM: PC, MAC

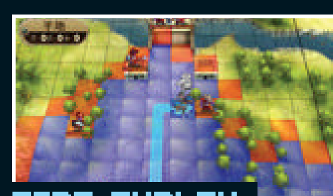
The series may have become complicated, but this latest release represents a return to form. Stripping away some of the bloat and streamlining the basic empire-building concept, it's the most accessible entry yet.



TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2

■ YEAR: 2011 ■ SYSTEM: PC

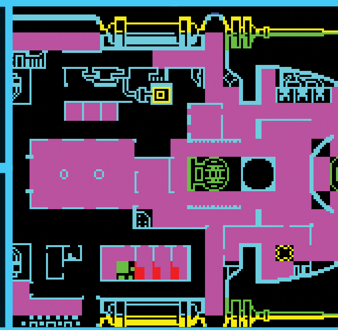
The phenomenally popular *Total War* series mixes real-time tactics and turn-based strategy for the masses. After several iterations, this most recent entry marks a successful return to the feudal Japan setting.



FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

■ YEAR: 2012 ■ SYSTEM: 3DS

The latest in a line of strategic adventures that have lit up Nintendo consoles over the years. This anticipated new entry for the 3DS is already available in Japan and is set to debut in Europe and the US later this year.



COLLOP'S GAMES

NEBULA

■ YEAR: 1984 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM

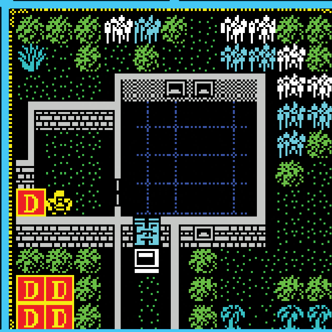
Written entirely in Sinclair Basic, *Nebula* was the first game that Julian both designed and coded. Playing against the computer or up to four human opponents, the idea is to assume control of a galaxy. A decent programming debut.

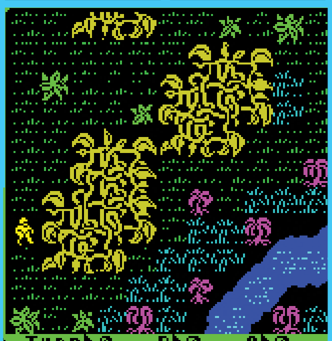


REBELSTAR RAIDERS

■ YEAR: 1984 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM

The first in the popular *Rebelstar* series, featuring two opposing sides (the 'operatives' and the 'raiders') and three story-driven scenarios. It's with this game that Julian trialled squad-based tactics for the first time.

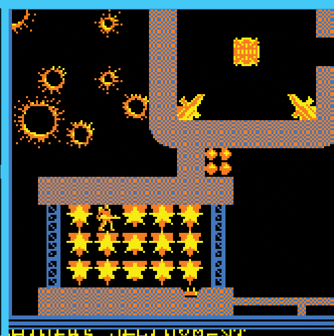




REBELSTAR

■ YEAR: 1986 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, CPC

The successor to *Rebelstar Raiders* is far more polished (being written in assembler rather than BASIC) and introduces lots of new gameplay features that make for a more engrossing, interactive experience. One of the best budget titles ever.



LASER SQUAD

■ YEAR: 1988
■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, CPC, VARIOUS

A landmark release. *Laser Squad* built brilliantly on *Rebelstar* by introducing multiple scenarios, improved AI and more diverse tactics. It was the first of Julian's titles to be ported to the 16-bit machines.

REBELSTAR II

■ YEAR: 1989 ■ SYSTEM: SPECTRUM

Written prior to *Laser Squad* but released after, the third *Rebelstar* game serves up more of the same squad-based tactical action. It presents a more significant challenge, making it perfect for anyone who has mastered the previous game.



UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN

■ YEAR: 1994
■ SYSTEM: PC, AMIGA, PLAYSTATION

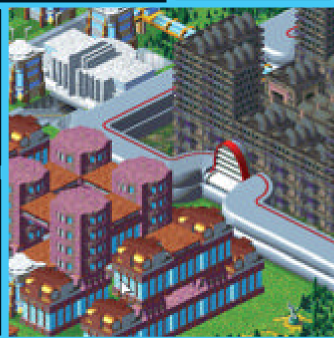
This hugely successful title began life as a sequel to *Laser Squad* before evolving into the stunning first game in the *X-COM* series. Perhaps Julian's crowning achievement to date, this is a masterpiece of the strategy genre.



X-COM: APOCALYPSE

■ YEAR: 1997 ■ SYSTEM: PC

Having left *X-COM* behind, Mythos created this overlooked fantasy-themed RTS that's effectively the third game in the *Chaos* series. The role-playing elements that were present in *Lords Of Chaos* are expanded here.



MAGIC & MAYHEM

■ YEAR: 1998 ■ SYSTEM: PC

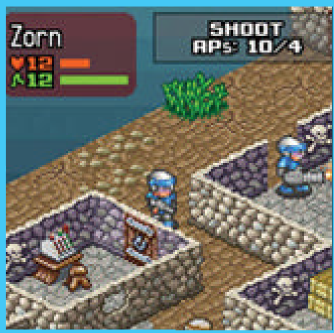
Having left *X-COM* behind, Mythos created this overlooked fantasy-themed RTS that's effectively the third game in the *Chaos* series. The role-playing elements that were present in *Lords Of Chaos* are expanded here to very good effect.



XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

■ YEAR: 2012 ■ SYSTEM: PC, X360, PS3

This long-awaited reboot was done without Julian's involvement, but even the most cynical gamers can't deny that Firaxis has handled the job with care. Equally suited to veterans and those new to the series.



REBELSTAR: TACTICAL COMMAND

■ YEAR: 2005 ■ SYSTEM: GBA

The fourth and most recent *Rebelstar* game was released for the GBA. This turn-based strategy title is viewed from an isometric perspective and plays like a tactical RPG.

GHOST RECON: SHADOW WARS

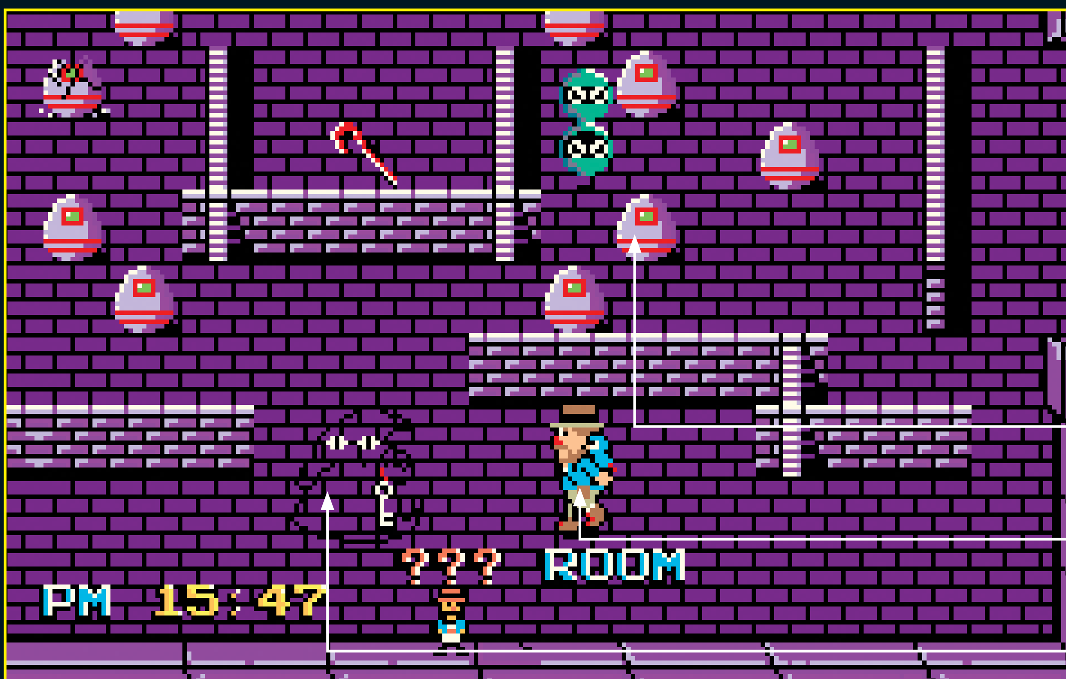
■ YEAR: 2012 ■ SYSTEM: 3DS

Despite being set in the Tom Clancy game universe, this tactical RPG is very much a Gollop game. Proving that classic turn-based titles can still work beautifully on the latest console tech, this was the best game in the 3DS's launch line-up.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





» You must break open these eggs (on some screens they're chests) by kicking them. You can also kick them into enemies *Pengo* style.

» This is your character, Dr John. He's a hirsute adventure (like Chuck Norris on the Japanese arcade flyer).

» This ghost holds the key to the exit. To get it simply fire a couple of rounds into it.

MYSTERIOUS STONES – DR. JOHN'S ADVENTURE

■ **Developer:** Technos ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Maze game

■ **Loosely based on an earlier unconverted maze game by Technos called *Eggs, Mysterious Stones* is similar in design but applies an *Indiana Jones* skin to the gameplay.**

You play the role of an adventurer called Dr. John (in Japan he was called Dr. Kick) who travels the globe in his aeroplane searching for ancient treasures and artefacts. The only problem with his vocation is that the places he visits always seem to be swarming with unfriendly creatures that don't seem to like treasure-stealing visitors all that much.

Like most maze games, the gameplay of *Mysterious Stones* is an even-ish blend of collecting and avoiding. Once inside a temple, the object of the game (as far as we could work out) is to kick treasure chests and things that look like large Fabergé eggs to find the one trapping a mischievous spirit that holds the key to the exit.

To get the ghost to drop the key, you have to shoot him with your pistol and once you have it all the exit doors in the room will magically open and you must decide which threshold to walk over. The aim is to find the treasure room. Find this room and you get a choice of pocketing one of three different treasures, and once one has been selected all the exits open up and you must then make your escape and get back to your pilot waiting outside to fly you home.

To make his mission a bit easier, Dr. John can use his pistol against the taller enemies. However, to defeat the smaller, squattier foes, he's forced to rely on good old fashioned boot power, or kick the eggs and chests into them *Pengo* fashion.

The cartoon visuals, presentation and subtle narrative approach to the action work really well to give *Mysterious Stones* a bit more depth than most maze games. However, the things that let it down are that the object of the game isn't made all that clear, the controls feel a little unresponsive and the hit detection a bit woolly at times. Timing kick attacks can take a while to get the hang of, and as enemies move pretty quickly and attack from multiple sides it can result in some frustrating deaths. Overall though, *Mysterious Stones* is a decent maze game with some nice presentational touches and varied gameplay.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

PENGO 1982

The egg-kicking gameplay of *Mysterious Stones* is reminiscent of the block-sliding gameplay of this earlier maze game from Coreland and Sega. It received ports to the Game Gear, Atari 2600, 5200 and C64.

THUNDER CEPTOR

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1986 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] It looks better in motion, as this screenshot makes it look like an ugly Mode 7 game.

■ ***Space Harrier* inside a tunnel or the trench run from *Star Wars* arcade expanded into a colourful raster arcade game, these are both pretty good ways to describe how this sprite-scaling shooter from Namco plays.** Sadly *Thunder Ceptor* is not as good as either of those aforementioned classics, and this is because it suffers from boring enemies and action that feels a bit plodding.

Shooters like this are ten a penny, and *Thunder Ceptor*, while not the worst we've played, doesn't do enough to stand out from the pack. The objective of the game is to reach the end of each stage before your ship runs out of power, while trying to shoot down as many air and ground-based enemies as you can. Obstructions such as boulders and moving bollards must be avoided and you must also ensure you keep your ship within the confines of the tracks as coming in contact with the invisible side barriers slows it down. The 3D effect is quite effective but even though overall the graphics look a bit blocky and rushed, it still spawned a sequel.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

STAR WARS 1983

We'd say *Thunder Ceptor*'s gameplay most resembles the dramatic trench run sections of the *Star Wars* arcade game, a game that was ported to pretty much every machine ever made. Well, pre-1988 ones, anyway.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SPY HUNTER 1983

Radical Radial's blend of avoid the obstacles and shoot down the enemies has an obvious feel of Bally Midway's *Spy Hunter*. It was ported to a load of machines, just avoid the buggy NES version.



RADICAL RADIAL

■ **Developer:** Nichibutsu ■ **Year:** 1982 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up

■ **A simple but effective twist on the vertical shooter, *Radical Radial* sees you driving a big tyre.**

But this tyre is no ordinary tyre, as it can shoot bullets and jump, and you'll need to rely on both actions if you want to get far in the game. The basic aim of *Radical Radial* is to get to the end of the track, avoiding obstacles (though you'd think given the shape of the vehicle it would just be able to roll right over them), shooting down alien enemies, and picking up bonus points to boost your score.



» [Arcade] If you've ever wanted to drive a weaponised metal donut around some dangerous roads, this game is for you.

Each stage is split into three distinct sections. The first one we've just explained, the second is basically a congested bit of freeway cluttered with cars that resemble colourful pills and capsules. In these sections you are unable to fire your weapon and must rely on driving skills and the jump to escape collisions. The final section is dubbed a bonus round, and provides an opportunity to collect some extra points before reaching the finishing line. There's not much to *Radical Radial*, but it does get quite addictive.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

KEN-GO

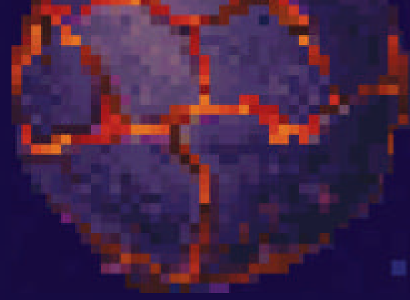
■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **This mediocre run-and-gun game starts off well, but quickly becomes a churn of recycled enemies, frustrating bosses and tedious and bland level design.** When two samurai witness their family members slaughtered at the hands of a motley crew of nasty assassins, they decide to wage a two man war on those responsible, killing each in turn. In that respect *Ken-Go* is kind of like *Kill Bill* meets Sega's *Shinobi*, with our heroes dishing out vengeance with their swords.

The most interesting thing about *Ken-Go* is its combat system, which sees attack and block assigned to the same button. Now that might sound like a recipe for disaster, but it actually works surprisingly well. You perform quick attacks by tapping the fire button, and hold it down to block. The clever thing though is that when you release the fire button it shoots a concentrated projectile of energy, and the longer you sustain the block the more powerful it becomes. This charge attack is the key to taking out the bosses this century, as attempting to kill them using the basic attack will physically age you.

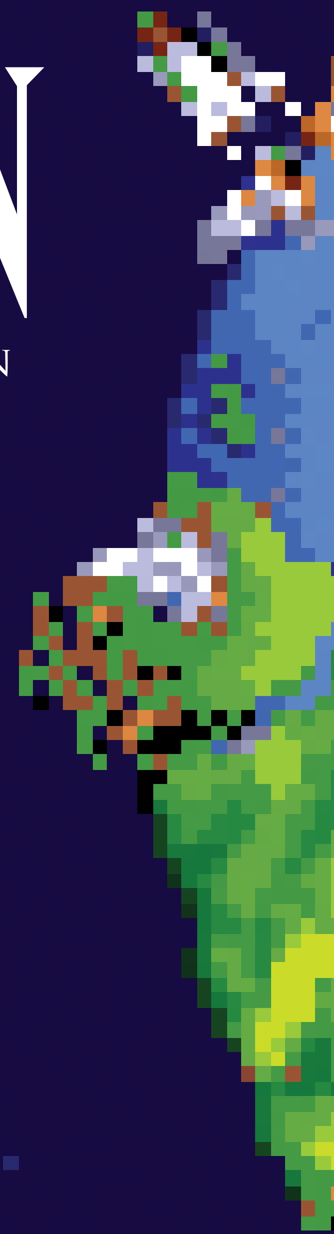






The History of CIVILIZATION

Civilisations come and go, but there is one type of Civilization that continues to prosper. Kim Wild talks to Sid Meier about the creation of a genre-defining classic and why this Civilization keeps on growing



Mankind's historical background has always fascinated creative individuals, whether it is in within the field of media or in re-creating real life scenarios. When it came to Sid Meier's entrance into the computer game industry, his natural passion for the subject was a perfect fit for his time at Microprose. "I've been interested in history since childhood and have always enjoyed reading books, watching movies and playing games about the past," explains Sid Meier. "When I began making computer games in the early Eighties, I thought it would be fun to create a game in which a player could experience the different eras throughout human history and actually rewrite it as they play."

While there has been some speculation that *Civilization* was entirely based upon a board game of the same name involving the same concept, the inspiration came from several sources. "*SimCity, Empire*, *Railroad Tycoon*, and my love of history were the different inspirations for *Civilization*," says Sid. "*SimCity* inspired *Civilization* in a way."

Created by Sid Meier, with Bruce Shelley as producer, many of the core elements for the game were accomplished between the two of them before the team started to slowly expand to accommodate artists and designers. Yet to start with, *Civilization* did not resemble the turn-based epic it is today and actually took place in real time. "The first prototype of *Civilization* that we made was a real-time game like *Sim City*, in that you placed cities and moved things around, but cities grew without you," recalls Sid.

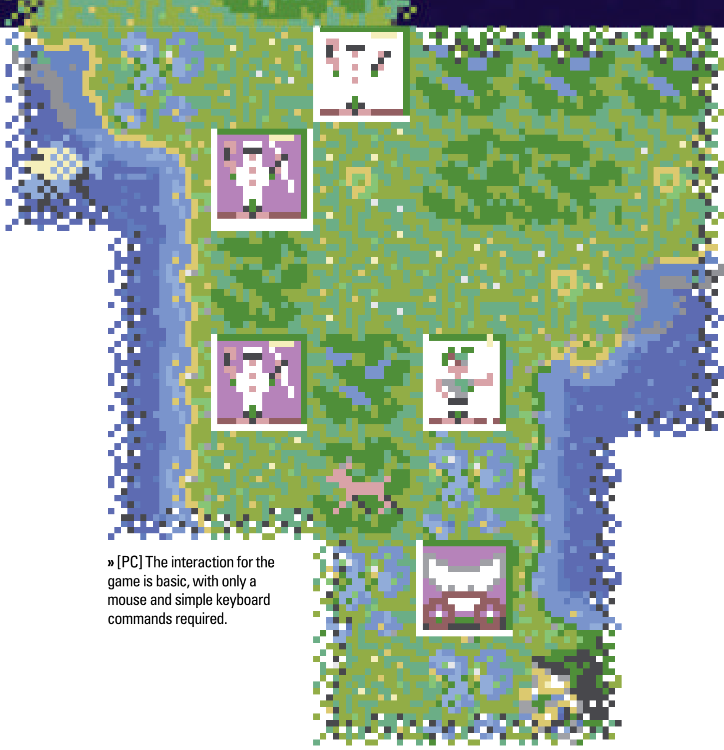
However, the duo soon found that this version wasn't particularly interesting. "We just couldn't find the fun," admits Sid. "So I put it on the shelf, made a couple of other games and then came back to *Civ*. You basically seeded the world in a kind of *Sim City*-esque way. What I didn't like in that version of *Civilization* is that you did a lot more watching than you did playing. So we decided to make it a turn-based game. Once we were happy with the design we went full steam into production and it took about one year to complete. "

With the emphasis firmly on historical content and structure to create *Civilization*, it did mean that the art style was quite basic and there wasn't the focus on pushing technology to its limits. "We try not to let technology drive our games. Rather, we come up with fun ideas and then bring them to life using the tools available at the time." adds Sid. "We were really happy with the way the first *Civilization* turned out. Clearly the graphics were not nearly what they are today, but players were able to use their imaginations to bring the game to life, which seemed to be what originally attracted many folks to the game."

The final version of *Civilization* resulted in a game that saw players pick one ruler of their desired nation and starting with one settler unit, build an empire spanning from the year 4000 BC into modern times ▶







» [PC] The interaction for the game is basic, with only a mouse and simple keyboard commands required.

▶ and eventually, into the Space Age. "We picked sixteen civs which seemed to be the right number," recalls Sid. "We didn't want to have too many and risk that the game was too difficult for players to manage – more is not necessarily better. It's always tough deciding which civs to choose. We try to have a good representation of cultures, but there is usually someone who feels left out."

Good management was key and mastering negotiations, warfare, exploration as well as building cities with budgets were a focus to succeed. The development of technology (from the alphabet to the wheel) and wonders of the world (including the Pyramids and the Great Wall) could also be developed. The combined use of history with strategic gameplay made *Civilization* a unique game that became a critical success and is still cited as one of the most influential PC games to have ever been released.

While *Civilization* was a groundbreaking title, it was the arrival of the sequel that introduced new features, although there would be a five year gap before the game would come to market. *Colonization*, designed by Brian Reynolds and Sid Meier, released in 1994, gave the team additional ideas to work towards a sequel. Feedback from fans of the original



» [PC] The Windows-based interface inspired by CivNet made *Civilization II* more user friendly than the original.

as well as left out features provided the groundwork for the follow-up. Although Sid Meier oversaw the project, the game design belonged to Brian Reynolds. The diplomacy and economy systems were re-vamped, new units and technologies were introduced. The combat system was overhauled and the AI was completely re-written.

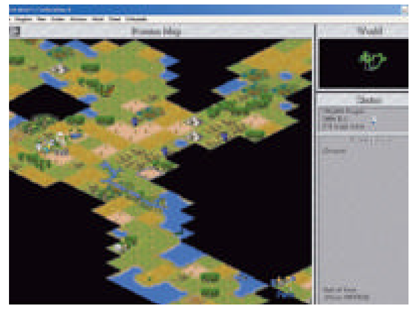
Getting computer opponent AI right is something that is consistently worked on for each *Civilization* game. "One key is to never let the computer have more fun than the player. The player's experience is always central to the game. The beauty of turn-based AI is that it has no inherent advantage over the human player. In a real-time game, the AI has an

"One key is to never let the computer have more fun than the player"

SID MEIER



advantage because it can control all units at all times while the human can control at most one unit or one group of units. In turn-based games, the AI is literally playing the same game as the human since it can only move its units and make its decision as often as the player can – exactly once per turn. Game AI always follows behind game design. Until



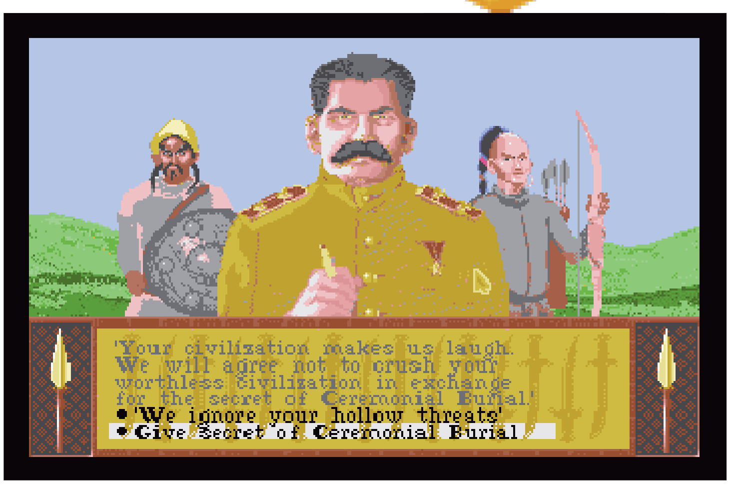
» [PC] With its updated visuals, exploring the world of *Civilization II* gave you that "just one more turn" feeling.

the game rules and mechanics are finalised, the AI must be an ever-changing system."

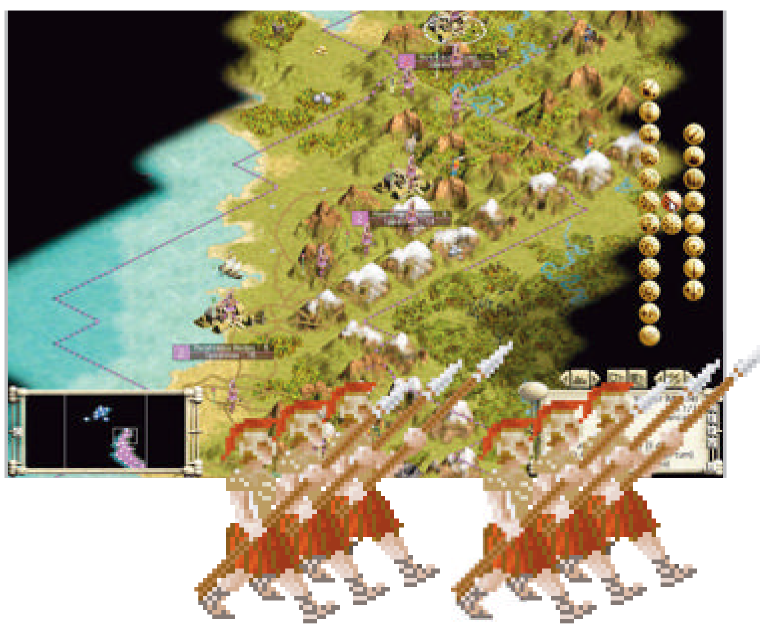
Sid's approach to game design ("I design all of my games by first creating a playable prototype and making sure it's fun to play – even with place holder art and rough mechanics. We then iterate on the prototype – play, improve, play, improve – until we've made a game we feel people will love. I've never been one to create a written design doc – it's much more effective to show people what you're doing than to tell them about it") was a method that Brian Reynolds replicated while working on *Civilization II* and enabled him to convince managerial staff of the game's viability.

The style of the game was also different, making the interface far more accessible. Microprose's multimedia department featured Michael Ely, Tim Train, and Jason Coleman who became responsible for the 'Wonder Movies' that celebrated player's milestone achievements and actors were hired to play the advisers. As sequels go, the list of changes and additions were quite extensive, with many small tweaks such as health bars making it into the game.

Although multiplayer code was initially created for *Civilization II*, time restrictions meant a separate MP Gold Edition was released for those who wanted the option. Another huge change, and one still used today, was the concept of fan-generated content, where players could create their own scenarios



» [PC] On your travels in *Civilization* you will encounter hostile countries and have to make the choice to ally or betray...

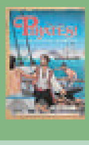




MORE FROM MEIER

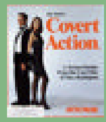
PIRATES! (1987)

■ A swashbuckling classic that contained many of the trading elements that would surface in *Civilization. Pirates!* would later be remade for a modern audience in 2004.



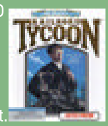
COVERT ACTION (1990)

■ Taking on the role of Max (or Maxine) Remington, the world of James Bond espionage was available with a variety of mini-games against the clock.



RAILROAD TYCOON (1990)

■ A business sim based around a railroad company, the series spawned several sequels, most notably the fully 3D *Railroad Tycoon II* on Dreamcast.



GETTYSBURG! (1997)

■ A real-time strategy game that focused on troops during the Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War and had a thriving mod community, tweaking maps, etc.



ALPHA CENTAURI (1999)

■ Developed without the *Civilization* name, *Alpha Centauri* is considered to be an unofficial futuristic instalment in the series and often considered one of Meier's finest games.



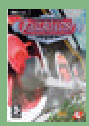
SIMGOLF (2002)

■ A collaboration between Will Wright and Sid Meier, this little gem is *Theme Park* crossed with golf and gave the player the ability to design their own courses, bringing a level of interactivity.



RAILROADS! (2006)

■ A follow-up to the long-running *Railroad Tycoon* series, *Railroads!* made the leap into three dimensions and focused on RTS gameplay using real historical events.



and share them with others. The scenario and map editors that were included not only extended the lifespan of the game (which even today are still actively used among the fan base community) but also made it easier for the designers to create several expansion packs. *Conflicts In Civilization* (1996) *Fantastic Worlds* (1997) and *Test Of Time* (1999) expansion packs were all released to keep fans playing until the arrival of the third game.

With *Civilization III* released in the year 2001, the reins were handed over to Jeff Briggs and changes were once again made to the formula. At this point in the series juncture, the game was under the banner of Firaxis Games, a new studio formed by Sid Meier, Brian Reynolds and Jeff Briggs. A whole new 3D graphics engine was created which resulted in the removal of the 'Wonder Movies' due to a clash with the visual style. Air combat saw the greatest change, with units able to move more freely and differ to ground based vehicles. Nick Rusko Berger, the lead artist, based the artwork style on a book that had the famous Tower Of Babel by Pieter Brueghe on the front cover featuring paintings from the 1560s. In-game music was created to reflect the culture and era of the time and sound effects were made interactive.

While the bulk of historical research has been done over the first two games, it's an ever ongoing process. "We like to say that we do the research after the game is made. Meaning that it's most important for us to find the fun first and then go about filling in the details. We have a terrific team at Firaxis, many of whom are history buffs, so we really enjoy making sure the historical details are right. However, when we're faced with a design decision between making something fun or making it historically accurate, we choose fun every time," responds Sid.

Some of the Wonders of the World were removed while the culture of your empire plays a greater role in trading or combating other civilizations. The majority of the *Civilization II* units remain although the worker is a new one that can be used to create colonies. Like its predecessor, several expansion packs were released: *Play The World* (2002) added eight new leaders, eight civilizations and new multiplayer modes, while *Conquests* (2003) introduced new governments, eight civilizations, new resources, terrain and scenarios aimed specifically for the multiplayer mode.

Taking a culture from one era to another is a huge task. "We designed the game around the different eras to create manageable chunks of time to help players progress through the game without feeling overwhelmed," explains Sid. "Each era offers new things to explore, build and research as well as new units that have increasingly more powerful skills to offer. We also start small with just one settler so that the player can build their civilization at their own pace and take on more complexity and competition as they are ready to handle it. By the modern era players are well versed at being king and are ready to rule the world."

Soren Johnson took over the lead for the development of *Civilization IV* in 2004 ▶



» [PC] With over four million copies sold and counting, *Civ IV* is the most successful game in the series.

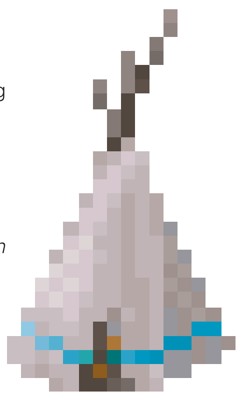




» [PC] *Civilization IV* carries an impressive Metacritic score of 94 per cent.

which went on to become the most critically acclaimed and best selling version of the series to date. Wonder Movies made a return, gameplay was streamlined to make it more accessible to newcomers, the skill tree was more flexible and a whole roster of new units, promotions, technologies and Great People were available (Leonardo Da Vinci and Shakespeare to name a couple). *Civilization IV* is the most customisable game in the series, with a world building option and more flexibility. *Civilization IV* would receive three expansions: *Warlords* (2006), *Beyond The Sword* (2007) and *Colonization* (2009), the latter of which was a remake of the original *Colonization* using *Civilization IV*'s game engine.

A collector's edition of the series surfaced in 2006 entitled *Sid Meier's Civilization Chronicles* and bundled together *Civilization I*, *Civilization II*, *Civilization II: Fantastic Worlds*, *Civilization II: Conflicts in Civilization*, *Civilization II: Test Of Time*, *Civilization III*, *Civilization III: Play the World*, *Civilization III: Conquests* and *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*. The box set also incorporated a card game created by *Civilization IV* lead designer Soren Johnson,

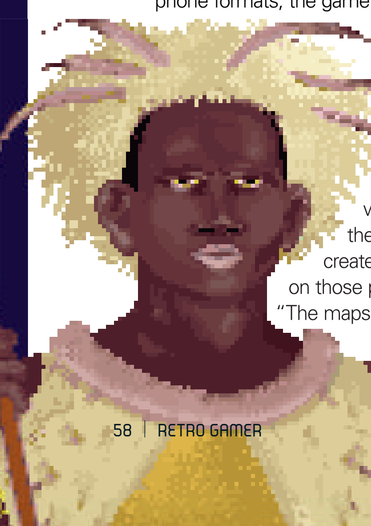


It's pretty compelling to become a major player in the making of history

SID MEIER

a video DVD and a comprehensive book containing the history of the series.

The arrival of *Civilization Revolution* in 2008 saw a version created specifically for a console audience and saw Sid Meier return to the franchise as lead designer. Released on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Nintendo DS and mobile phone formats, the game was well received critically and did an excellent job of scaling the format down but without diluting the core experience. "We worked within the specs of the console systems to create a fun *Civ* experience on those platforms." says Sid. "The maps are not as big as the PC versions, so there are fewer civs, units, buildings etc., which means more streamlined choices. There's not as much 'stuff' going on at one time, but as you play you uncover layers of new things to explore and decisions to make that deliver the epic experience *Civilization* players enjoy."



Civilization V arrived in 2010 and proved to be the most divisive of the series among the fanbase. With the fourth game having made considerable tweaks to a successful formula, Firaxis needed to take the next game in a different direction to avoid complaints of being too similar to each other. Still a highly polished game in its own right, with revamped graphics, tutorials, added diplomacy options and religious options, many players felt that the AI was inferior to *Civilization IV* and had many gameplay changes. A patch was released earlier this year that fixed a lot of game-breaking bugs that had crept in and restored the balance of power back to the player.

Civilization has also ventured online into the world of social networking. "I've designed a social network *Civ* experience for Facebook called *Civilization Network*. It includes solo, competitive and cooperative play to take advantage of the uniqueness of social networks and allow players to join together with friends to create the world's most powerful, richest, smartest, or just plain coolest civilization. Anyone interested can join our Facebook fanpage at www.facebook.com/civnetwork," explains Sid. The app is called *Civilization World* and can be found at www.apps.facebook.com/civworld.

The expansion pack for *Civilization V: Gods and Kings* altered many people's perceptions of the series, with many viewing it as a full fledged sequel as opposed to an expansion pack. Released earlier this year, two years after the original game, it breathed fresh life by reintroducing the concept of religion back into the fold. Rather than choose a religion, one can be built up over several different components and faith can be accumulated, which can then be used to purchase new belief systems to

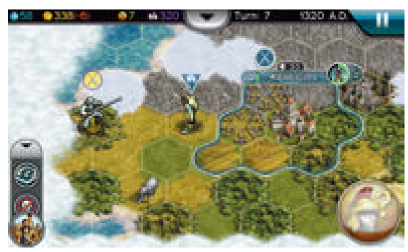


eventually make an established religion that can dominate a city.

For all the versions that have been released, Sid is reluctant to name a favourite. "The original *Civilization* established the core game experience and the versions after that have added to it in some fun way. So, I'd have to say that all of the versions of *Civ* embody the vision for the game and we've been happy with the new and interesting features each new version has added to the experience."

Five main titles, expansion packs, a facebook app later and eight million sales and counting, *Civilization* continues to grow and has maintained its popularity. Plans for further instalments have yet to be announced but we're fairly certain that this is not the end for the franchise.

So why, we ask Sid Meier finally, does he think the series remains so highly regarded and fondly played? "History is a topic that appeals to all kinds of people all over the world. And it's pretty compelling to be given the chance to become a major player in the making of history and create your own story" speculates Sid. "That along with the "just-one-more-turn" factor that we discussed earlier seem to be what people like best about the game."



» [Mobile] Amazingly, *Civilization V* has also been ported to mobile phones.



» [PC] While *Civilization V* is a far more accessible game, some fans prefer the streamlined world of *Civilization IV*.

WORLD BUILDERS

WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE OTHER VIDEOGAMES THAT HAVE ALLOWED YOU TO CREATE EXCITING NEW WORLDS



POPULOUS (1989)

■ Heralded as creating the 'god genre', Peter Molyneux's creation sees the player take the role of a deity who can lead followers into battle and become the ultimate ruler of the world. With the ability to manipulate land and interfere with the people, *Populous* understandably went on to become hugely successful.



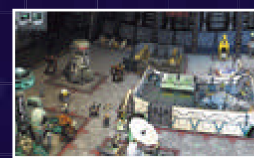
SIMCITY (1989)

■ Will Wright's *SimCity* enabled players to build their own city within a budget while trying to keep a demanding population content. Released on the C64, Amiga, Mac and PC, its success led to several acclaimed sequels and a new game is currently under development.



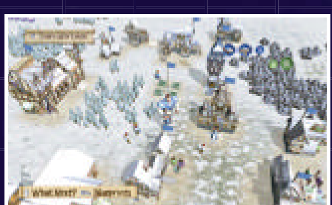
THE SETTLERS (1993)

■ The main responsibility in *The Settlers* comes down to resource management, ensuring there are enough materials for constructing buildings, feeding the population and expanding the city to conquer neighbouring civilizations. Played at a much slower pace (some games can be completed in 50 hours), *The Settlers* has nevertheless accumulated a sizeable fanbase.



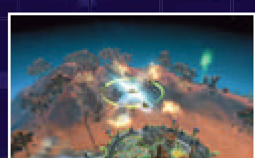
STARTOPIA (1998)

■ The creation of Mucky Foot (former employees of Bullfrog), this criminally overlooked title saw you re-build a space-station, hiring all manner of aliens to staff it as you leech money off the clientèle whilst trying to mould the landscape to suite their eclectic tastes. An extremely ambitious release.



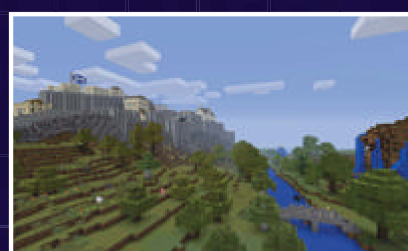
A KINGDOM FOR KEFLINGS (2008)

■ Tailor made for a console audience on Xbox Live, *Keflings* is a humourous, light-hearted look at the city building genre that is full of depth despite its cartoony appearance. Online multiplayer enables players to co-operate and build their own city together. Its sequel, *World Of Keflings*, also comes highly recommended.



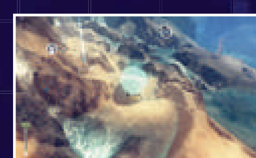
SPORE (2009)

■ Another Will Wright creation, *Spore* sees you create a unique creature and use it to design and craft buildings and cities to populate the entire universe. While the DRM restrictions angered many players at the game's release, being able to interact with other people's creations remains a compelling prospect.



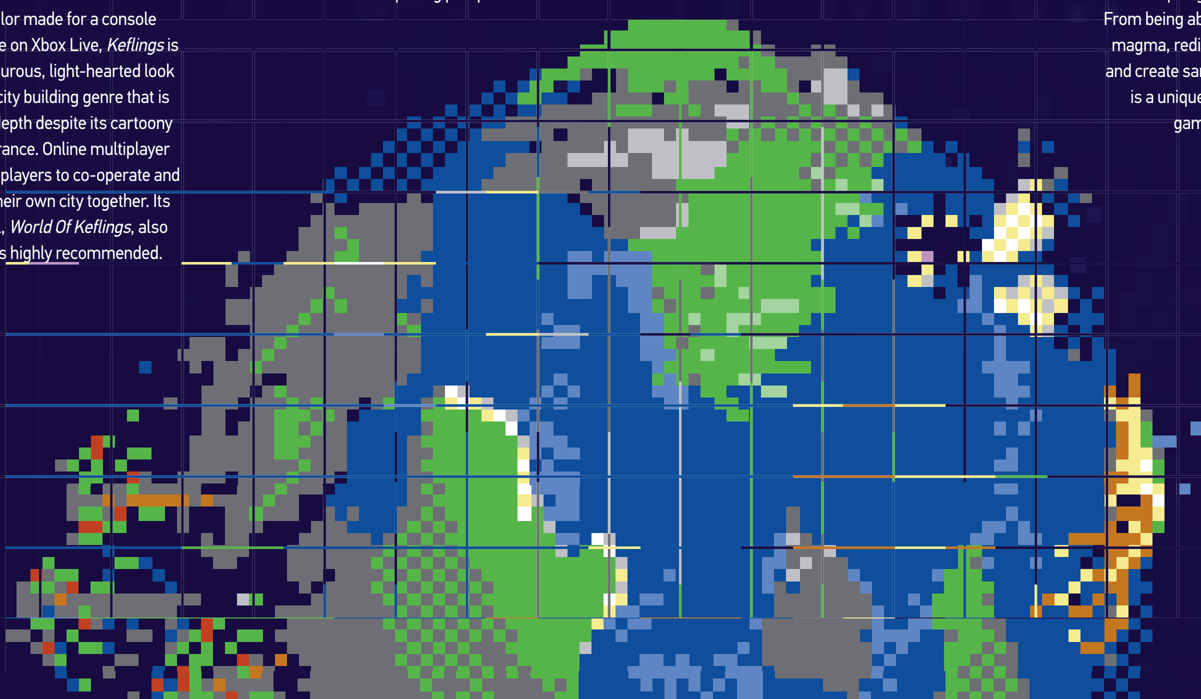
MINECRAFT (2010)

■ Initially released online for free before becoming a paid Beta, *Minecraft*'s growing popularity saw it arrive on Xbox Live last year where it found a whole new audience. With the ability to build and recreate any object or building to the finest detail, this is a Lego fan's dream.



FROM DUST (2011)

■ Eric Chahi's return to the videogame industry saw him create *From Dust*, a tribal game that puts you in control of the landscape against the elements. From being able to control volcanic magma, redirect powerful rivers and create sand dunes, *From Dust* is a unique twist on the god game formula.





GAMING LEGENDS

SID MEIER

From engaging combat sims and entertaining trains to creating Civilization, Sid Meier is legendary among PC gamers. In a rare interview, for a special edition of Gaming Legends, the influential game designer discusses his remarkable and enduring career in the games industry

Perhaps turned off by their strategic, military and historic looking surfaces, we suspect there are a fair number of gamers who have never played a Sid Meier game. Some of the most fun and intellectual simulator games ever written, the likes of *Civilization*, *Pirates!* and *Railroad Tycoon* aren't games you play to finish, or experience that extravagant set-piece moment everyone's discussing by the water cooler, but games you enjoy learning from, returning to and having whir away nicely in the background. They offer deep, factual worlds to tinker with, and highlight the most unique and important ingredient videogames have over those in film and literature: you.

This personal connection actually plays a big part in Meier's approach to game design, as all his games are based on a topic or theme that interests him. All his games have started their development the same way: find the fun and build on it. As the famous story goes, one of Meier's earliest games was inspired by a flight simulator arcade game he found he could master by being able to exploit its enemy AI. This led to a challenge being put to Meier by his then work colleague Bill Stealey to write a better one, and ended with both quitting their jobs to set up MicroProse in the early Eighties and focus on writing and selling games.

MicroProse started out as a two-man operation, with Meier writing the games and Stealey out on the road, visiting retailers along the East Coast to sell them too. With their sales order book filling, the men realised the business potential of videogames and set about growing their company. MicroProse soon built up a solid reputation for producing engaging, deep, but fun and entertaining combat simulators, titles including the submarine sim *Silent Service*, and the combat flight games *F-15* and *F-19*. Both MicroProse and Meier became so renowned within the genre that when Meier came to Stealey with the idea for *Pirates!*, his partner was adamant that Meier's name be on the box.

At the start of the Nineties, MicroProse began moving further away from its military simulation roots. Meier would release *Covert Action*, a James Bond-inspired action strategy game and then followed that up with *Railroad Tycoon*. A business sim at heart, *Railroad* allowed players to build and manage their very own railroad company, while learning the history of rail travel. Players not only had to set up their business from scratch, but pay close attention to the various cargoes, manage deliveries, and fend off rival companies competing for your business.

But the game that Meier is most recognised for is the one that followed next. *Civilization* expanded greatly on the ideas and gameplay *Tycoon* laid down by allowing players to construct their own empire and effectively rewrite and shape history. Inspired by several game sources, including *Empire*, *SimCity* and *Railroad Tycoon*, *Civilization* was one of the deepest and epic strategy games of its kind. From 4000BC right up to the Space Age, it allowed players to be creator and ruler of their very own civilisation, growing it from a single settlement and making decisions on everything from exploration, building and warfare. Furthermore, as time passed in the game so too did technological advances, with discoveries (such as the wheel and flight) having a big impact.

In 1993 MicroProse was purchased by Spectrum HoloByte, a California-based studio also renowned for creating simulation style games. Two years following the deal, Meier decided to leave MicroProse to focus on game design. Meier set up Firaxis Games in 1996, a studio he co-founded with ex-MicroProse game designers Jeff Briggs and Brian Reynolds. Since its inception Firaxis has become renowned for releasing high quality strategy titles, while continuing the *Pirates!* and *Civilization* brands. Now a subsidiary of 2K Games, Firaxis' last project was last year's *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, a worthy and critically commended update of the revered strategy series created by Julian Gollop.

In 1999 Meier was the second person to be inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' Hall of Fame – after Shigeru Miyamoto – and received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Game Developers' Conference in 2008. An avid gamer himself, Meier is one of the PC industry's most recognised and influential game designers. ▶



THE INTERVIEW

So tell us about the key events that led to you writing games and forming MicroProse.
I guess I've always been interested in games. When I was a child I would play games and invent games with soldiers and blocks and all sorts of stuff. This was in the dark days, of course, before we had computers, it was when I went to college that was the first time I was exposed to computers. I was interested in learning to program but still there wasn't much in terms of games in those days. Shortly after I finished school, the Atari 800 computer appeared, which was the first personal computer I had. It was no so much for the engineer or the hacker, more for the programmer, so I started for fun making games on the Atari computer. The first one was kind of a version of *Space Invaders*, and I was just kind of combining two things that I really enjoyed: games and programming. Then I met Bill Stealey and I told him I was having fun writing games for my own amusement. He was a high energy guy, entrepreneurial, and said 'Let's start a company'. So we started MicroProse. But it was just me being, in a lot of ways, at the right place at the right time, being at the very beginning of the whole computer gaming industry, and having an interest in both games and computers and pretty much making it up as we went along.

How did your relationship with Bill Stealey work at MicroProse? Coming from a military background, would Bill have much input into the strategic and accuracy aspects of your games?
He would play them and he would give me good feedback. We worked really well together because the things we liked to do didn't really overlap. I enjoyed creating the games and programming and he enjoyed selling them and running the company. So we had a really good partnership in terms of each doing our thing and appreciating what the other was doing. He had lots of ideas about games, and especially the military games. He had lots of contacts and could get us secret air force manuals or cool information about aeroplanes. It was a very good partnership.

What were those early years at MicroProse like?
We call them the good old days. What was worrying about them was that we were making things up as we went along. We didn't have genres, we just would say 'Let's make a game about aeroplanes or submarines, or railroads', and we'd just make it, not worrying about which genre it was going to fit in and who the audience was. We just made games we enjoyed playing and hoped other people would have fun playing. Today almost every good topic has already had a game done on it, probably five or six games, but we were able to bring out the first pirates game, and one of the first games about railroads. So it was a lot of wide open territory back in those days that we got to explore and innovate.

When MicroProse began to grow, how you did find the change from creating games by yourself to working with a team of developers?
It happened relatively slowly. I actually did all the art up until *Silent Service*, and then we hired an artist and I realised he could do a much better job than I could with the art [laughs]. I also did all the sounds for quite a while. In those days it was almost a one-person operation probably for the first four or five games. And

then I did appreciate what a real artist and real sound designer could do, and yes I did enjoy working with them. But for quite a while I actually tended to be the only programmer on the game and integrated their work. There was only so much we could do so I was still able to be involved with every aspect of the game. Actually, the one thing we actually started to let go was the writing. Because in those days the MicroProse manuals were 150/200 pages and we actually hired people specifically who were knowledgeable in these topics to write these cool manuals with a lot of history. So in that way the teams gradually got a bit bigger, but they never got all that large at MicroProse.

What were your reasons for leaving MicroProse, and looking back was that a difficult decision?
It was kind of to recreate the good old days, in other words a small studio just focused on making games. Being part of a larger company, there are considerations about stock value and the pressure in terms of schedules and deadlines becomes a little more intense. It wasn't a bad situation particularly, but we kind of wanted to get back to the root of game design and focus on that. So a couple of us decided it was time to go for something a little smaller and a little more focused on just making games.

Did you find it easier going through the whole start-up phase again with Firaxis?
Yes. We knew a lot more when we started Firaxis then we did when we started MicroProse. I think by that time we kind of knew what we liked to do and what we were good at and not so good at. And so we had an arrangement with Electronic Arts, they were our publisher, and kind of encouraged us to do what we did, which was make games, and we got moving pretty quickly and it was a very fun experience. We enjoyed being again responsible for ourselves, and independent, and having to deliver.

Is creating educational as well as entertaining games something you want to continue doing?
We actually don't consider our games to be educational. I think what we believe is people don't



» [PC] *Civilization* is inarguably the series that Meier is most recognised for. It spawned several sequels, as well as the *Colonization* spin-off games.



» [PC] *Railroad Tycoon* is one of Meier's most recognised series and has to date spawned four popular sequels.

"We were making things up as we went along. We didn't have genres"

enjoy being educated but they do enjoy learning, and we kind of give players the opportunity to learn a bit about the world and a bit about themselves as well I think. With a game like *Civilization*, or almost any one of our games, you can explore your own strategy, your own ideas, your own thoughts about different ways of playing that you enjoy, and most players I think feel that they're getting better as they play, that they're learning something about the game and how things work.

You've said in the past that you like to make games based around topics that interest you. Are there any you've yet to tackle and have you ever thought about what you would do if you run out?
There are plenty of topics left [laughs]. No, for every game we actually release there's probably one or two prototypes we've created and couldn't work out how to turn it into a game but are still lingering there. One of the classics we've talked about is a dinosaur game, which we've never actually done but we think we need to do someday because dinosaurs are just cool. So there are lots of topics still out there left to be done and of course we've taken some of our classic games like *Railroads* and *Pirates!* and as the technology has evolved we have been able to bring them back by taking advantage of the new technology, so there's plenty of stuff for us to work on and I don't expect to run out of ideas any time soon.

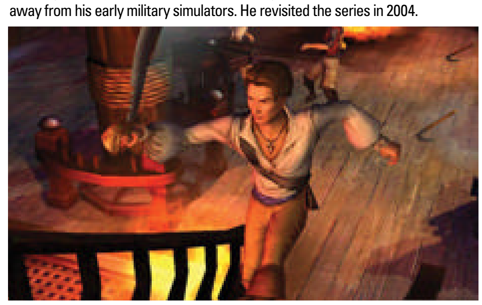
What can you tell us about that dinosaur game you were working on, what style of game is it?
We started it. We did three different approaches to it and it just wasn't as cool as dinosaurs needed to be. So we eventually said 'Well let's put it aside and maybe come back to it later.' The reason we prototype – we're very strong believers in early prototyping – is so we can figure out whether something is fun very early before we're committed to it because there is nothing less fun than having to finish a game that is not going to be fun, so we want to figure that out early on. And with the dinosaur game we tried a couple of different things. We worked probably a month or two on each of the three prototypes and just didn't feel like it was going to be as much fun as it needed to be, so we moved on to something else.

Does research plays a big part in your games?
[Laughs] Actually there's some degree, but we have a saying round here which is 'We do the research when the game is finished' because we actually don't want to put all sorts of obscure facts into the game to impress the player with how much we know about whatever. We tend to do that after the game is done





» [Amiga] Sid Meier's *Pirates!* was the first game from Meier that moved away from his early military simulators. He revisited the series in 2004.





» [Xbox 360] Firaxis' last game was *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, a superb update of the sci-fi strategy title, though Meier admits his involvement was fairly limited.

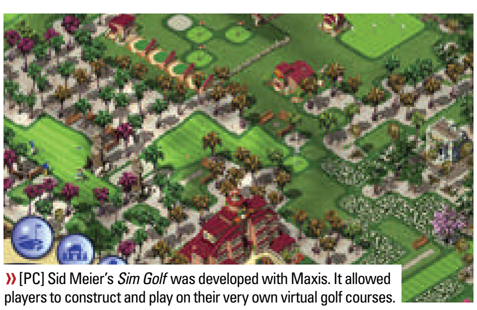
so that we can rationalise why the game is the way it is. Most of the game design decisions are based on what makes the game most fun and most interesting, because the idea behind a game like *Civilization* is not that we duplicate history but that you create your own using some basic historical pieces and scenarios. We're not crazy about overdoing the research. Some of the research is just to find a new civilisation, what's cool about this civilisation, what's cool about this unit, and just add that little touch so the players as they're playing are having fun but they are also maybe picking up some interesting titbits about the real world, which adds that bit of learning to the game.

Many of your games are regarded as influential, but what games have most influenced you?
SimCity in its day was a revelation for a lot of us as game designers. It started the constructive type game as apposed to just the destructive types of games. I've also really enjoyed the *Age Of Empires* series of games. When consoles came along I think they kind of demonstrated this plug and play approach which influenced us on the PC side of it, and we said 'Wow, it's really fun to just plug something in and start playing, and not have to read the manual or not have to figure out a bunch of things', so that was a bit of an influence. I've always enjoyed playing other designers and other companies' games to see what they're doing, things like *StarCraft*, and anything that Blizzard has done has been amazing. So I think we're all not really competing with one another, but trying to make gaming a really viable and popular form of entertaining.

You're famous for creating simulator and strategy titles, but are there any other genres that you enjoy and would consider writing for?
I really enjoy racing games, for example *Gran Turismo*. But I would never write that game because there's really so much preparation work and just getting to where you could do a viable game would be a big investment. So I really enjoy those games but it's just not a game that we have the resources to write. I enjoy racing games, and I also enjoy some of the first-person shooter games. Again, it's not something that I would probably want to design because there are a lot of good ones out there. We are trying to make new games and games that haven't been made yet. Probably the same games most gamers play are the ones I most enjoy, but the kind of cost of entry for games these days is pretty high in terms of wanting to get into a new type of game and is not something that's practical. Now of course, with indie games and tablets that might change, but to do a triple-A type game on a new topic I might like to try where games are already established it really wouldn't be practical at this point.

Firaxis recently worked on the *XCOM* series, what was that experience like, working on an established franchise you didn't create?
Each game really has its own story and development path, and *XCOM* was really a labour of love by Jake Solomon, who was the lead designer and has really been bugging us, for probably ten years now, to make a remake of *XCOM*, and we finally got tired of listening to him and said 'Okay, go ahead and do it. It's a very interesting game because it has a very vocal and enthusiastic fan base based on the original, which many people feel is one of the best games of all time. So trying to live up to that legacy was a real challenge and you're always faced with that question: how much can you change it to really respond to today's technology and how much do you really need to keep of the core concepts? Things like that. I think Jake did a really good job of walking that tightrope and creating a game that felt emotionally like the original but also really took advantage of all the new technology we have, and the look and feel of the game is very modern. I had fairly limited involvement. I would talk to Jake every now and then and we would discuss different things but it was really his design and his vision that led that project.

Finally, looking back, what do you feel have been your career highlights?
Being able to come to work everyday and do something that I really love to do, that's a constant highlight. I'm very fortunate to be able to do that. Certainly the reaction to *Civilization* and the way it's stayed alive for 20 years or so has been amazingly gratifying, and being able to talk to people who have played it and really see their enthusiasm for what they got out of the game and the enjoyment they got is something that gives me energy and encourages me to keep making games. I think being part of this industry is a highlight for me. It's a wonderful, creative, exciting place to be and I still enjoy every day of it.



» [PC] Sid Meier's *Sim Golf* was developed with Maxis. It allowed players to construct and play on their very own virtual golf courses.



» [Amiga] MicroProse was bought by Spectrum Holobyte in 1993. Sid stayed on at the studio for about two years before setting up Firaxis.



» [PC] Firaxis continues to release *Civilization* titles, with the most recent being 2010's *Civilization V*.



TELL US SOMETHING WE DON'T KNOW

We ask Sid to reveal something very few people know about his three most iconic games

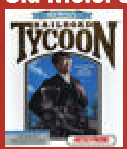
Sid Meier's Pirates!



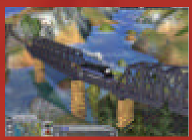
Pirates! was actually inspired by a technological trick. I don't want to get too technical, but in the Commodore 64 version, which was the original version of *Pirates!*, one of our programmers came up with a cool trick where we could create images, pieces of art, by packing them into a font. And that allowed us to very quickly bring in new pictures. That's kind of why *Pirates!* is really a game about seeing a new piece of art combined with a menu. We just had a technology that allowed us to do a kind of storybook approach to adventure gaming.



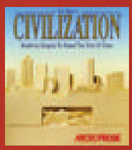
Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon



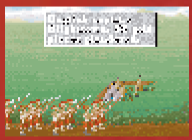
One of the little-known facts about that game is that it actually started out as a model railroad simulation. I said wouldn't it be cool if I could build a model railroad in an hour instead of however long it takes to build a real model railroad. So it started off as a model railroad simulation and we kept adding more and more pieces to it until it turned into a history of railroads.



Sid Meier's Civilization

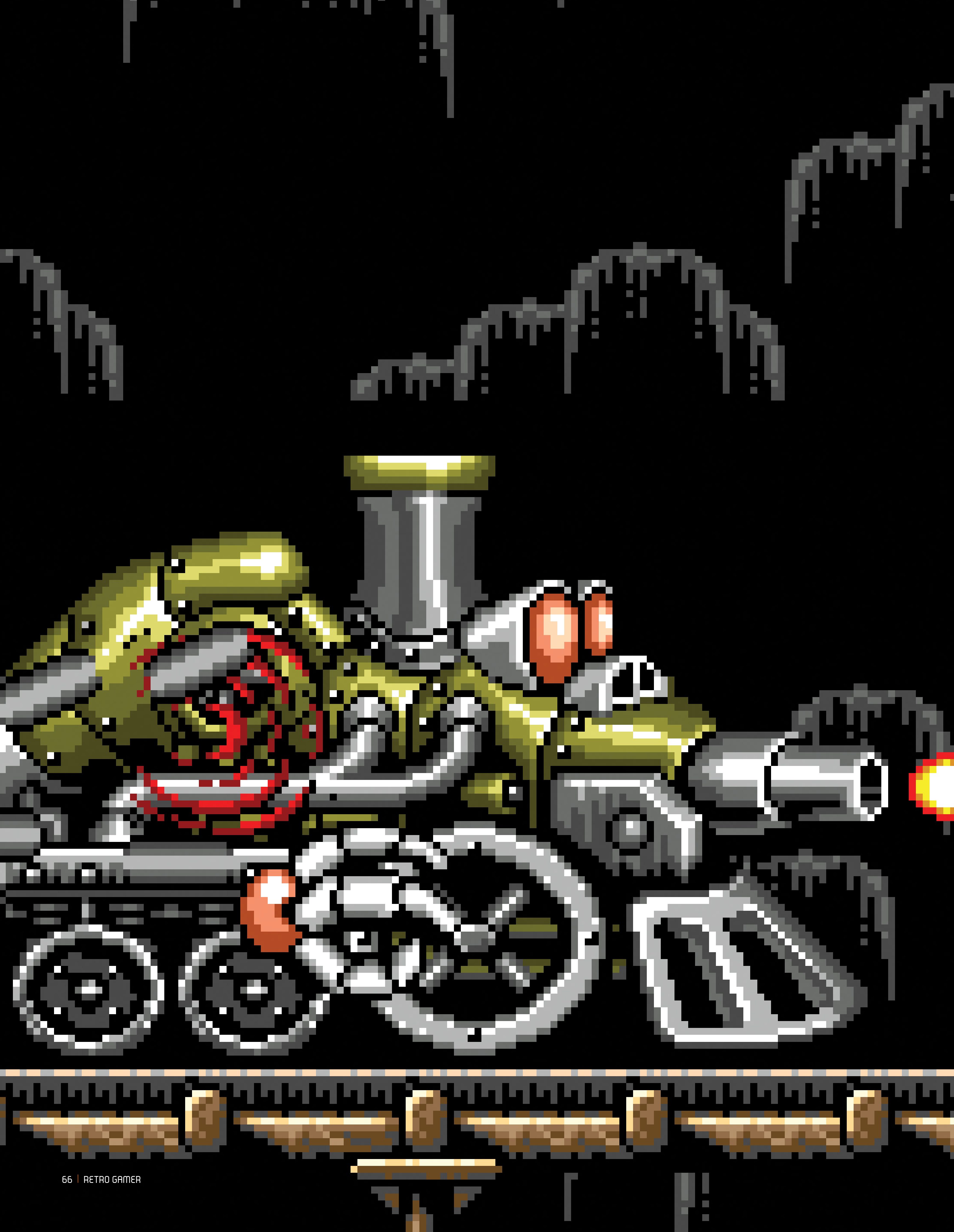


One of the interesting facts about *Civilization* is that we didn't really feel it was going to be successful when we released it. We liked it, we thought it was fun, but it took three or four months for it to catch on and then we started to see some response. You know today when we think of people lining up at the stores at midnight to buy games, it was the opposite with *Civilization*. It took a couple of months for the word to get out there and then it gradually developed momentum, but at first it didn't look like it was going to do all that well. So, that was how *Civilization* turned out.



» Sid at his Firaxis studio, which is situated in Hunt Valley, Maryland.

Special thanks to Matt Roche and Sid Meier for his precious time. Sid Meier photography © Carla Waller, Carla Waller Photography



Rocket Knight Adventures

GREATER THAN THE OPOSSUM OF ITS PARTS

» RETROREVIVAL



» KONAMI
» 1993
» MEGA DRIVE

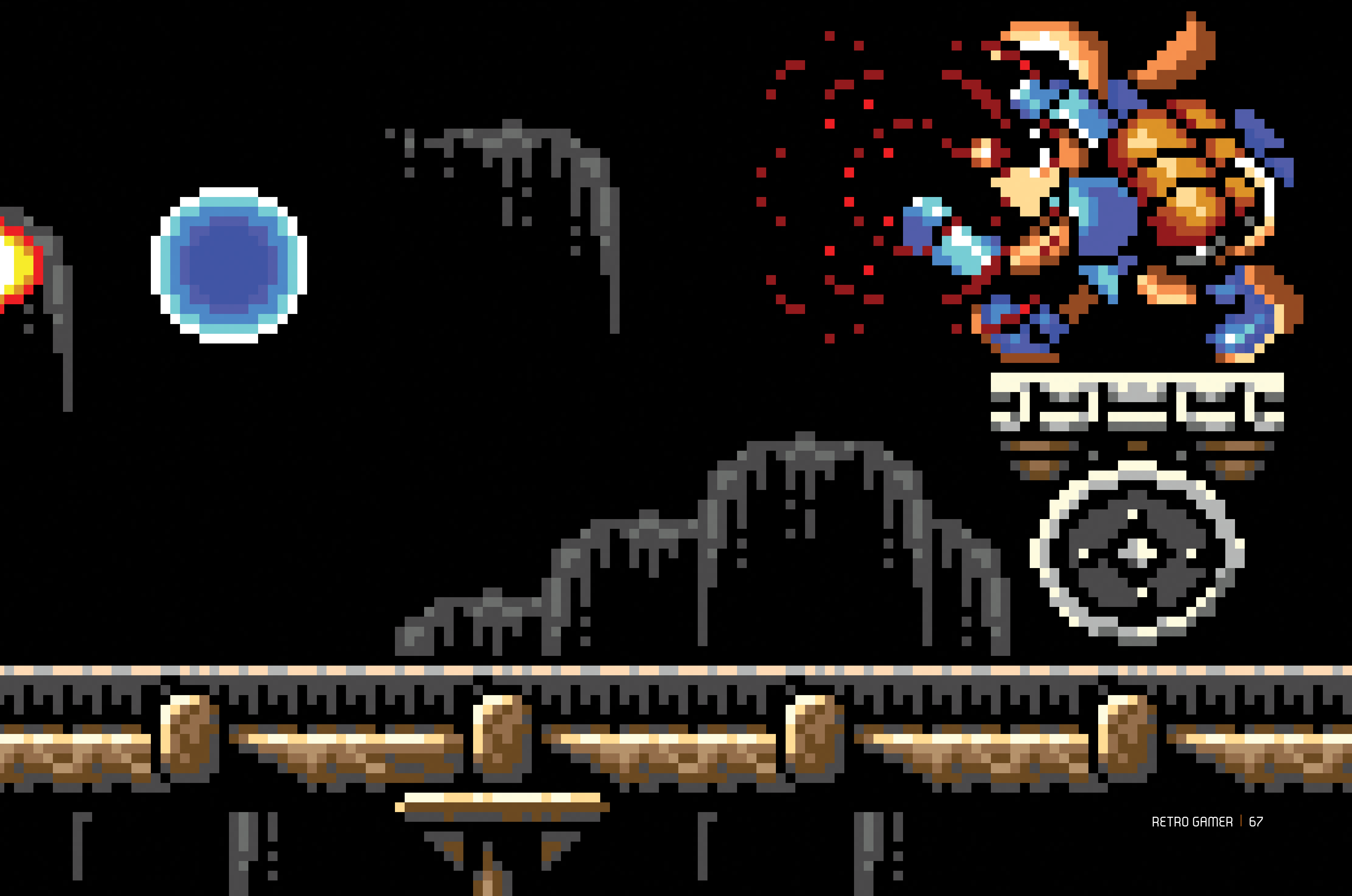
Though *Sparkster* and *Rocket Knight Adventures 2* were solid games, for me the first game is the best in the *Rocket Knight* series, meshing brilliantly a cutesy action platformer with the kind of imaginative level design, memorable bosses and ferocious difficulty you'd expect to see in Konami's *Contra* series. This is no coincidence, mind you, as the series was the brainchild of Nobuya Nakazato, the designer of several *Contra* games including the acclaimed *Contra III* and *Contra: Hard Corps.*

For those unfamiliar with the character, Sparkster is a knightly opossum armed with a sword that can fire energy bolts and a rocket pack that lets him zip merrily around the screen. Most of the time this whizzing ability is used to help him reach inaccessible areas but in some stages it is used to a much more tactical and challenging effect, particularly the penultimate one – a taxing castle comprising of deadly booby trap rooms – where success depends on using it accurately.

Rocket Knight is a well designed platformer, and each one of its six stages tends to feature something cool and interesting. This could take the form of a well designed section of a level to tackle, or just some lovely visual effects – such as the level in which you must use the mirror properties of some glassy lava to see the platforms you need to jump on. Add in a few stages that play out like a side-scrolling shooter, and *Rocket Knight* is, save for a couple of frustrating moments, a solid game, one that contains more depth and variety than the average platformer.

The visuals and presentation are also of a high standard, with in-game cutscenes and even incidental stuff going on in the background of some stages. And there are some neat visual effects too, the boss battles are equally imaginative, with our favourite the one in which you get to jump inside a giant robotic pig suit and fight Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots style.

With lavish presentation and varied levels, *Rocket Knight* is a solid platformer, which, tucked in amongst that colourful throng of 16-bit anthropomorphic platformer heroes that burst on the scene in the Nineties, may have passed some gamers by.





The Mega Drive remains Sega's greatest selling console, selling over 40 million units since its release. Adam Buchanan explains why you should be building the ultimate collection to Sega's ambitious 16-bit console and highlights its best games and peripherals

SEGA ME



» **Manufacturer:** Sega » **Models:** Mega Drive, Mega Drive 2, Mega Drive 3 » **Launched:** 1988 (Japan), 1989 (US), 1990 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

GA DRIVE

Mega Drive: The Collector's Guide







» The Super Magic Drive was a copying device, allowing gamers to transfer ROM data to floppy disks or PCs.



» The Sega Mega Drive had numerous updates over the years. The Mega Drive II shown here was first released in 1993.



Why it's collectable

While Sega is no longer a major player in the videogame hardware world today, the legacy of its 1988 release – the Sega Mega Drive – still lives on. Despite being discontinued in the late Nineties and moved aside to make way for its younger 32-bit sibling, countless gamers are still lining up today to secure a library of Mega Drive classics.

The Mega Drive was not only set to be the successor to the Master System, but it was also a direct result of Hayao Nakayama's desire to bring the coin-op experience home. By modifying its System-16 arcade hardware, Sega intended to create a console every bit as powerful, and one that made it easy to port arcade releases to. While this creation held a lot of promise and potential, its eventual October release in Japan was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3* on the Nintendo Famicom, released a week earlier.

However, its importance was soon recognised once it arrived in the West. On 30 November, 1990, Sega brought its console over to European shores to build upon the strong foundations that the Master System had already cemented. With arcade ports of *Altered Beast*, *Golden Axe* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* available from day one, the Mega Drive had finally found success – or at least the start of it.

Aggressive advertising campaigns, Electronic Art's unauthorised reverse engineering of the hardware, and a thriving import market would begin to push Sega closer to success, but this didn't truly begin to accelerate until 23 June, 1990. On this day an instant hit was born – bearing stunning visuals, fast gameplay and an iconic soundtrack, all of which were accompanied by an attitude-filled mascot – Sonic The Hedgehog. The speedy blue mammal's emergence marked what may be the most important event in Sega's history, and the Mega Drive's lifetime. The UK based publication *Mean Machines Magazine* singled it out as 'the best platform game on the Mega Drive' to date and their assessment was spot on – not only did the title go on to sell 15 million copies worldwide and become the start of a long series, Sonic also became an internationally recognisable character. The shelves of Woolworths and the back pages of the Argos catalogue were flooded with *Sonic The Hedgehog* pencil cases, jigsaws, comics, clothing and sweets.

Whilst this is only a snippet of the 16-bit system's story, retro gamers often find themselves returning to the Mega Drive to indulge in its plethora of software that's stood the test of time. *Sonic 2*, *Streets Of Rage II* and *Gunstar Heroes* are just a small selection from the colossal count of 531 known unique European releases. While the number of available titles towered over the Japanese catalogue of just over 400 releases, it was dwarfed by the run in North America, where the platform welcomed over 700 titles. This difference produced a selection of region exclusive releases that failed to make the cut worldwide. Europe in particular missed out on ground-breaking titles such as *Pulseman*, *Twinkle Tale*, *Musha Aleste* and *Golden Axe III*, leaving fans wondering why, as they headed down to the local import shop prepared to pay double.



» Due to the popularity of Sega's console there were plenty of great magazines available for it.





» The Multi-Mega was an interesting combination of the Mega Drive and its Mega-CD add-on. It's now quite rare.

Did you know?

■ In December 1994, the hit TV show *Bad Influence* gave two minutes of prime time to something that could have knocked the stuffing out of Sega's Christmas plans. An all new and unauthorised Mega Drive hardware clone, the Scorpion 16, was demonstrated on air. For just £70, this bootleg device offered compatibility with the existing library of 16-bit titles along with built in functionality to play region locked imports. Somehow, this unofficial kit managed to make its way into a few select high street chains, but not for long. The Scorpion 16 was soon nowhere to be seen and has since become an incredible rarity.



» *Mean Machines* was an awesome magazine, covering plenty of essential Mega Drive releases like *Probotector*.



This broad selection, however, did suffer from a highly contagious infection of sports software – with nearly one quarter of the PAL selection on offer being digital renditions of the playing field, something which could be attributed to Electronic Arts' influence on the 16-bit era. Initially, Mediagenic took control of Sega's request to develop a licenced Joe Montana Football game – however, the team was soon behind schedule. With Sega of America panicking, EA was soon called upon during extra time to pass them a lifeline. Once EA's last minute replacement game touched down, it was an instant hit. Sega of Japan's previous concerns regarding sports games being a poor investment was soon slam dunked. Countless developers caught on to this growing trend, and alongside EA, just about every sport under its glowing stadium lights had its own Mega Drive triumph. The technically impressive *FIFA International Soccer* was undoubtedly the most popular digital football offering; however, these days it has quickly become the least favourite. Its never ending unwanted presence at car boot sales and secondhand shops usually signals that you were just pipped to the post of a more appealing selection.

Although the Mega Drive was officially laid to rest in the late Nineties, the last two decades have seen the system still populate the production line. South America has continued to sell the 16-bit hardware, with distributor Tec Toy targeting those unable to afford modern consoles. During an observant stroll through a South American high street, it's no surprise to see Mega Drive compatible *Guitar Hero* controllers, exclusive ports of more recent games such as *Duke Nukem 3D*, and even brand new releases such as *Férias Frustradas Do Pica-Pau*.

Elsewhere around the world, a handful of developers still consider the Mega Drive a viable platform for new releases. Super Fighter Team, to name just one, recently acquired the rights to translate and re-release a selection of obscure foreign releases. The first of these was a 1996 Chinese exclusive RPG known as *Beggar Prince*, which saw a physical cartridge release in 2006, and further proved that there was still a market for new software on the Mega Drive. Super Fighter Team released a couple more titles after that, but the playing field was then forever changed upon WaterMelon's late arrival. Their heavily delayed atmospheric RPG, *Pier Solar*, took six years to develop and became the largest title in Mega Drive history at 64Mbit. The limited 2010 print run was met with much controversy over a delayed pre-ordering process, leaving many to demand a refund. As the homemade hit now fetches nearly ten times its original cost when placed up for auction, those who abandoned ship early had to hold out for the (also limited) reprint edition.

The Mega Drive has become a popular starting ground for nostalgic gamers, while bringing more than enough challenge to the hardcore collectors. The array of reasonably priced definitive titles and several rarities bordering on the quadruple figure mark at auction, further prove that there's something for everyone with Sega's 16-bit system – as long as you can withstand all the American footballers and soccer superstars.

THE PERIPHERALS



» There was a large number of excellent games available for the Master System, making this device essential if you owned the console.

» There are two versions of the Master System Converter available. This model was designed to work with the Mega Drive II.

Master System Converter

While Hayao Nakayama and Hideki Sato were collaborating to create the Sega Mega Drive, the latter of these two masterminds decided to add a little more sparkle. Sato's forward thinking introduced built-in compatibility for keyboards, mice, floppy disk drives, modems, graphics tablets and even a printer, regardless of whether this additional functionality would ever be used by consumers. But this was just the start of a console desperate to be something more.

Not only did this pre-emptive planning pave the way for the future release of the Sega Mega CD add-on, but it also offered Sega's back catalogue a lifeline. Backwards compatibility with the Sega Master System (or Sega Mark III in Japan) was one of Sato's final additions. However, like the others, it would require additional hardware to work.

Three months after the initial launch of the Sega Mega Drive in Japan, the Power Base Converter (or Mega Adapter as it was known in Japan) was released. This unusually shaped device sat snugly on the top of an original Mega Drive console, covering a good portion of its exterior. At the top of the Power Base Convertor was a small flap that, when exposed, provided access to a Master System cartridge connector, ready for the game of your choice. Below this connector was a small credit card sized slot. While Sega did release their own 16-bit banking software, this card slot wasn't for your life's savings – instead, you could insert Sega's tried and tested media format containing games and software on a flat piece of plastic, the Sega Card (or My Card in Japan). The only other area of interest on the Power Base Converter was the Pause button, a duplicate of the same button found on the 8-bit hardware, and one Sega foolishly didn't wire up to the more accessible start button on the Mega Drive control pad.

How this adapter actually worked, though, is rather interesting. As Sato had already embedded the Master System's central processor (the z80) and sound chip (the SN76489) on the Mega Drive's motherboard, there was little for the Power Base Converter to actually do. Without a single component from the original 8-bit hardware present in the adapter, the Power Base Converter was nothing more than a glorified pass-through-port for Master System games. At ¥4,500 (or £39.95 on its UK release), you might be wondering why such an adapter was necessary. Unfortunately for gamers worldwide, no matter how hard you pushed, the Master System's cartridge pin arrangement was just too dissimilar to that of the Mega Drive's, making the Power Base Converter a mandatory purchase for nostalgic gamers.

When Sega redesigned the Mega Drive in 1993, the perfectly formed Power Base Converter was due a makeover, having become incompatible with the revised hardware. Thus, the Master System Converter II was born. This all new European exclusive adapter – formed for both the Mega Drive I and II – removed the Sega Card slot found on the original device and was more in keeping with the new look.

…AND THE REST



01. Pro Action Replay & Game Genie

■ Born into a culture fuelled by cheat codes and magazine pull-out tips, the Pro Action Replay & Game Genie offered an all new gateway into the world of game hacking. The cartridges, which slotted in-between the console and your game of choice, brought about infinite lives, level skips, one-hit kills and just about anything you could wish for.

02. Arcade Power Stick

■ Further driving home the message that the Sega Mega Drive was well equipped to serve as a coin-op equivalent, a control pad alternative known as the Arcade Power Stick arrived to give you a more authentic grip on the action. The most unusual addition to this peripheral, however, was the inclusion of auto-fire buttons – something arcade purists would likely frown upon.

03. Menacer Light Gun

■ Clearly inspired by Nintendo's release of the Super Scope bazooka, Sega's Menacer light-gun decided to take design one step further than its rival. When fully assembled with its detachable double barrelled scope and shoulder rest, the 16-bit light-gun was far from a worthy investment for reasons other than its sheer ridiculousness.

04. Magic Drive Plus

■ Hailing from the black market, the Magic Drive Plus was the Sega Mega Drive equivalent of the Super Nintendo's Super Wild Card – an unofficial device that could read and write game cartridges onto or from floppy disks. This pirate hardware was much harder to locate than its Super Nintendo counterpart, though it offered just as much functionality – albeit illegally.

05. Magic Key III

■ Throughout the Mega Drive's lifespan developers began devising various methods to prevent games from being imported before their local release date. The Magic Key III, however, rendered all attempts to hold back importers useless, due to its switchable region masking. Games from all over the world could now be played on the console with ease.

06. 4 Way Play

■ Knowing the limitations of the Sega Mega Drive's multiplayer functionality, Electronic Arts created an adapter to bring the party back home. Their 4 Way Play adapter slotted into the two controller ports on the front of the console, expanding the available player slots to four.

07. Justifier

■ While there was already a light-gun available for the Sega Mega Drive, Konami released its own bright digital weapon to accompany their 1993 port of the arcade shooter, *Lethal Enforcers*.

MEGA DRIVE The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ Despite having an incredible prequel to live up to, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* smashed all expectations and gave Mario twice as much to worry about.



Streets Of Rage II

■ With all new moves and comrades, the bare knuckle brawlers returned in 1992 to take on the mysterious Mr X – powering themselves up with any discarded meat they might find.



Gunstar Heroes

■ Treasure was clearly a developer capable of getting the most out the Mega Drive. The multiplayer mayhem up for grabs in *Gunstar Heroes* is captivating carnage at its best.



The Revenge Of Shinobi

■ Becoming a ninja-master is no easy feat, something Sega's incredibly hard action platformer *The Revenge Of Shinobi* taught gamers the hard way.



Disney Collection: Castle Of Illusion & Quackshot

■ While it might be cheating to include a compilation here, excluding either of Disney's cartoon capers from a top list would be criminal.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Comix Zone

■ *Comix Zone* is a direct result of Sega's boundary-pushing experimentation – a platformer that dared to think outside the box. Jumping from panel to panel of a once static comic book, Sketch Turner must take on one of the biggest Mega Drive challenges around to the sound of Howard Drossin's timeless soundtrack.



Dynamite Headdy

■ Our protagonist Headdy arrives in North Town amidst the evil puppet King Dark Demon's plans to convert the peaceful town's residents into devilish minions. *Dynamite Headdy*'s adventure isn't easy, but it is laced with cute visuals, a catchy musical background and gameplay to marvel at – something developer Treasure is known for.



Dragon's Fury (aka Devil Crash)

■ *Dragon's Fury* was an incredible interpretation of pinball, offering gamers something physical tables could not. The gothic multi-table affair featured demonic armies of skeletons to target whilst being led through winding passages and warp portals. Real tables were given a run for their money.



ToeJam & Earl

■ Any attempt to summarise the funkatron duo's attempt to escape Earth is destined to crash land. This insane multiplayer funk-'em-up, spanning multiple floors connected by disco lifts, is one of those games you need to experience at least once. You'll either love *ToeJam & Earl* or despise their many attempts to make you laugh.



Road Rash II

■ Not only did the sequel race in with more violence, more crashes and more frustration, but it also introduced nitrous oxide boosts and new weaponry. Whether you preferred to cleanly make your way to the finish line or instead, take out every rival with a chain to the face, *Road Rash II* is one of the finest Mega Drive titles ever released.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Rainbow Islands Extra

■ Despite being a coin-op classic, few decent ports of Taito's 1987 credit gobbler were released. The Mega Drive port, however, lives up to the name despite its default mode introducing questionable robotic enemies.



Golden Axe III

■ Why Sega felt their highly refined finale to the fantasy world hack-and-slash series should never leave Japan is anyone's guess. *Golden Axe III* has since become a rather desirable import.



Monster World IV

■ Stepping aside from its roots, the sixth and final game in the *Wonder Boy/ Monster World* series is the incredible story of Asha and her adopted pet Pepe – a 16-bit title not to be missed.



Magical Turbo Hat Flying Adventure

■ Based upon the *Magical Hat* anime series, this bonkers platformer did in fact see a European rehash titled *De-Cap Attack*. The import's untouched charm remains more desirable.

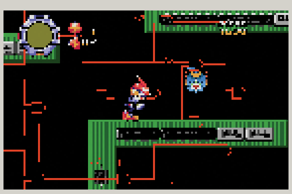


Granada

■ Although many will turn to *Gleylancer* and *Musha Aleste* for their shoot-'em-up fix, *Granada* is quite the hidden gem. WolfTeam's on-land tank freeroamer is often, and unfairly, overlooked.

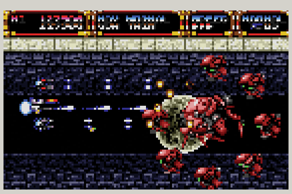


IMPORT THESE NEXT



Pulseman

■ Although most will remember Game Freak for its work on *Pokémon*, its 1994 Mega Drive offering *Pulseman* is not one you should dismiss too quickly. The energetic platformer centred around a cyber-terrorism battle brings a new dimension to this overcrowded genre, with an electrically-charged challenge to boot.



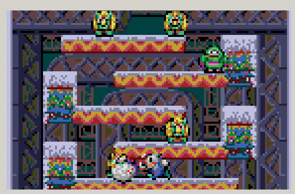
Gleylancer

■ While at first glance it appears to be nothing more than a glorified *Thunder Force* clone, this scrolling shoot-'em-up sets itself apart thanks to its advanced projectiles system. The command over the Advanced Busterhawk Gleylancer's surrounding satellites puts you in complete control to conquer this scrolling shooter.



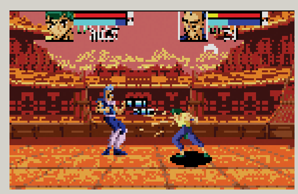
Twinkle Tale

■ *Twinkle Tale* was a Japanese exclusive release that fell into the overly popular run-and-gun genre. Stepping aside from the clichéd themes of army-clad jungle shooters usually found in this category, the mystical narrative and magical style introduced a much more diverse array of scenery and a formidable cast of difficult enemies.



Snow Bros

■ Despite being nothing more than a 16-bit port of a winter themed *Bubble Bobble* clone, *Snow Bros* is one of the most addictive co-operative titles on offer. The overly cutesy visuals coupled with the snowball mechanics make fighting for the top score a frequent Friday night occupation – if you can afford to import it.



Yū Yū Hakusho: Makyō Tōitsusen

■ The only title from Treasure's Mega Drive line up that failed to see a European release was this one. The 2D fighter based upon the *Yū Yū Hakusho* anime took inspiration from both *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*, merging their greatest aspects into a four player free-for-all frenzy.

SEGA MEGA DRIVE The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Daze Before Christmas

■ Similar to its Super Nintendo counterpart, the limited shelf life of *Daze Before Christmas* saw this festive release only available during the winter season of 1994.



Fatal Fury 2

■ For reasons we'll probably never know, *Fatal Fury 2* became an Australian rental exclusive title that would fail to see a retail release – aside from the few ex-rental copies that slipped through.



The Death And Return Of Superman

■ Before the days of *World Of Warcraft*, Blizzard Entertainment tried its hand at a *Superman* themed *Streets Of Rage* clone – an awful one that would become a desirable rarity for all the wrong reasons.



The Punisher

■ Capcom arrived all too late to add another side scrolling beat-'em-up to their catalogue, leaving *The Punisher* to sell in small quantities, despite being an enjoyable brawler.



Thunder Force III

■ Believe it or not, *Thunder Force III* was actually distributed in Europe. The US version was sold with an additional German text manual, immortalising this shoot-'em-up as quite the rarity.



GET THESE NEXT



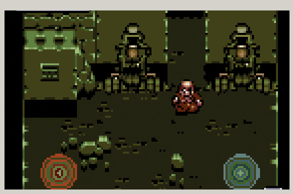
Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Stepping aside from his familiar circus theme, the sequel to *Aero The Acrobat* was nothing more than a new level pack for the disappointing platformer. Having failed to engage gamers previously, the updated release of *Aero The Acrobat 2* also sold in small quantities, making it a future rarity for Mega Drive collectors.



Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

■ *Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* from Acclaim was yet another side-scrolling brawler, but it had nothing to offer over its nearest rivals. Considered by fans to have damaged the Marvel name and strayed much too far from the original source material, this title is nothing more than a rarity.



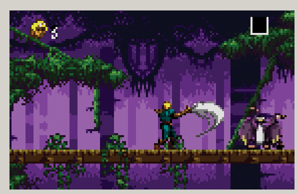
Addams Family Values

■ *Addams Family Values* was the 1995 tie-in to the feature film of the same name. Although Ocean had all the right ideas with its *Zelda*-inspired *Addams Family* RPG, their execution was a little too late. By the time it arrived, gamers had already moved on to the more compelling adventures offered by newer consoles.



Ecco Jr.

■ In an attempt to captivate a younger audience, Sega not only released the Pico hardware, but also a small selection of child-friendly titles. The Australian exclusive, *Ecco Jr.*, removed the difficulty of its predecessors by granting infinite air and energy, leaving kids the menial task of locating hidden fish among other chores.



The Pirates Of Dark Water

■ This short lived animated series produced by Hanna-Barbera was lucky enough to join the plethora of cartoons that spawned their own videogame. Oddly enough its Super Nintendo release was a far superior side scrolling brawler that left its lacklustre Mega Drive platformer counterpart to sink beneath a sea of poor reviews.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL Mega Drive game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection

What makes it so special?

■ In 1992 Sega teamed up with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society to name one of its protected dolphins Ecco. To commemorate the partnership, an oversized *Limited Edition Ecco The Dolphin Box Set* was released, containing a unique T-shirt, shared adoption certificate, audio tape, conservation paraphernalia, and of course, the iconic videogame.

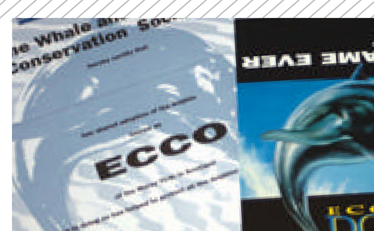


Why is it so expensive?

■ Before the days of DLC, limited editions were strictly limited – and this jewel in the crown is no different. The few remaining sets that have survived the last few decades untouched are genuinely rare, verging on endangered. Consequently, Mega Drive collectors will fight to the final bid on the rare occasions when one of these actually surfaces.

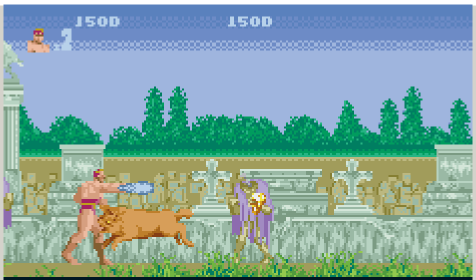
What makes it hard to find?

■ As many hunting this elusive rarity will tell you, you'll be lucky to even see the original packaging, never mind its contents. The incredibly hip *Ecco The Dolphin* T-shirt has since become discarded sleepwear, the blue-tac covered adoption certificate remains nowhere to be seen and the audio cassette tape presumably ended up at the local charity shop.



The Collector's Guide

THE PAL MEGA DRIVE GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN



Altered Beast

- Addams Family Values
- Addams Family, The
- Adventure Of Batman & Robin, The
- Aero The Acro-Bat
- Afterburner II
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
- Alien 3
- Alien Soldier
- Alien Storm
- Alisia Dragoon
- Altered Beast
- Animaniacs
- Aquatic Games Starring James Pond And The Aquabats
- Arrow Flash
- Asterix And The Great Rescue
- Asterix And The Power Of The Gods
- Atomic Runner
- Batman
- Batman Returns
- Battletoads
- Bio Hazard Battle
- Body Count
- Bonanza Bros.
- Bonkers (Disney's)
- Boogerman: A Pick And Flick Adventure
- Bram Stoker's Dracula
- Bubble & Squeak
- Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble
- Burning Force
- Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- Castlevania: The New Generation
- Cheese Cat-astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales
- Chiki Chiki Boys
- Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck
- Columns
- Combat Cars
- Comix Zone
- Cool Spot
- Cosmic Spacehead
- Crüe Ball: Heavy Metal Pinball
- Daffy Duck In Hollywood
- Daze Before Christmas
- Decap Attack
- Demolition Man
- Desert Demolition: Road Runner And Wile E. Coyote
- Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- DJ Boy
- Donald in Maui Mallard (Disney's)
- Double Dragon
- Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- Dragon Ball Z: L' Appel du Destin
- Dragon's Fury
- Dragons' Revenge
- Dynamite Duke
- Dynamite Headdy
- Earthworm Jim
- Earthworm Jim 2
- Ecco the Dolphin
- Ecco: The Tides Of Time
- Empire Of Steel
- ESWAT: City Under Siege
- Eternal Champions
- Ex-Mutants
- Exo Squad
- Faery Tale Adventure, The
- Fantastic Dizzy
- Fatal Fury
- Fatal Fury 2
- Fatal Labyrinth
- Fatal Rewind
- FIFA International Soccer
- Flashback
- Flicky
- (Mis)Adventures Of Flink, The
- Flintstones, The
- Forgotten Worlds
- Gain Ground
- Galaxy Force II
- Gauntlet IV
- General Chaos
- Ghostbusters
- Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- Global Gladiators
- Golden Axe
- Golden Axe II
- Gunstar Heroes
- Gynoug
- Havoc
- Hellfire
- Herzog Zwei
- Hook
- International Sensible Soccer
- International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- James Bond 007: The Duel
- James Pond II: Codename Robocod
- Jewel Master
- Jungle Book, The (Disney's)
- Jungle Strike: The Sequel To Desert Strike
- Jurassic Park
- Jurassic Park: Rampage Edition
- Kid Chameleon
- Krusty's Super Fun House
- Landstalker: The Treasures Of King Nole
- Last Battle
- Legend Of Galahad, The
- Lethal Enforcers
- Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters



The Punisher

- Light Crusader
- Lion King, The (Disney's)
- Lost World: Jurassic Park, The
- Lotus II: R.E.C.S
- Man Overboard!
- Marko's Magic Football
- Marsupilami
- Mazin Wars
- Mega Bomberman
- Mega Man: The Wily Wars
- Mega Turrican
- Mercs
- Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
- Mickey Mania
- Micro Machines
- Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- Might and Magic: Gates to Another World
- Mighty Morphin Power Rangers
- Mortal Kombat
- Mortal Kombat II
- Mr. Nutz
- Mutant League Football
- Mutant League Hockey
- Mystic Defender
- Normy's Beach Babe-O-Rama
- Onslaught
- Ooze, The
- OutRun
- Pac-Mania
- Paperboy
- Phantasy Star II
- Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom
- Phantasy Star IV
- Phelios
- Pink Goes To Hollywood
- Pinocchio (Disney's)
- Pirates of Dark Water, The
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- Power Drive
- Probotector
- Psycho Pinball
- Puggsy
- Punisher, The
- QuackShot Starring Donald Duck
- Rambo III
- Ranger X
- Ren & Stimpy Show Presents: Stimpy's Invention, The
- Revenge Of Shinobi, The

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

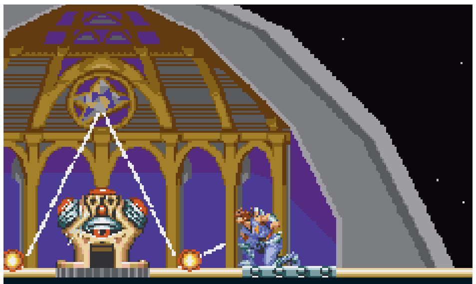
VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.


Strider

- Risky Woods
- Ristar
- Road Rash
- Road Rash II
- Road Rash 3
- RoboCop Versus The Terminator
- Rock 'N Roll Racing
- Rocket Knight Adventures
- Rolling Thunder 2
- Rolo To The Rescue
- Saturday Night Slam Masters
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi
- Shadow Of The Beast II
- Shining Force
- Shining Force II
- Shining In The Darkness
- Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons, The: Bart's Nightmare
- Skeleton Krew
- Skitchin'
- Smurfs, The: Travel The World
- Snake Rattle 'n Roll
- Soleil
- Sonic & Knuckles
- Sonic 3D Flickies' Island
- Sonic Spinball
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- Sonic The Hedgehog 3
- Space Harrier II
- Sparkster
- Speedball 2
- Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage
- Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin
- Splatterhouse 2
- Spot Goes To Hollywood
- Story Of Thor, The
- Street Racer
- Streets Of Rage
- Streets Of Rage II
- Streets Of Rage 3
- Strider
- Sunset Riders
- Super Fantasy Zone
- Super Hang-On
- Super Hydlide
- Super Skidmarks
- Super Smash T.V.
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
- Super Thunder Blade V
- Superman: The Man Of Steel
- Sword Of Vermillion
- Sylvester & Tweety in Cagey Capers
- T2: The Arcade Game
- TaleSpin (Disney's)
- Taz-Mania
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day
- Terminator, The
- Thunder Force II
- Thunder Force III
- Thunder Force IV
- Time Killers
- TinTin In Tibet
- Tiny Toon Adventures: ACME All-Stars
- Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure
- ToeJam & Earl
- ToeJam & Earl In Panic On Funkotron
- Toki: Going Ape Spit
- Toy Story (Disney's)
- Treasure Land Adventure, McDonald's
- True Lies
- Truxton
- Turrican
- Twin Hawk
- Two Crude Dudes
- Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
- Universal Soldier
- Urban Strike: The Sequel To Jungle Strike
- Vectorman
- Virtua Racing
- Virtual Bart
- Wiz 'n' Liz: The Frantic Wabbit Wescue
- Wolverine: Adamantium Rage
- Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair
- Wonder Boy In Monster World
- World Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck
- X-Men 2: Clone Wars
- Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zero Wing
- Zombies
- Zool: Ninja Of The "Nth" Dimension


Virtual Bart

Collector Q&A

We speak to Stewart Greenwood about his impressive collection.



So what drew you to collecting Sega Mega Drive games and hardware?
I was in a game store looking for a new PS2 game one day and couldn't find anything, when I noticed some really cheap used Mega Drive games, a few of which I remembered wanting when I was a kid. I still had my Mega Drive so I thought 'what the hell', bought them and never looked back!

What does the Mega Drive offer?
It's the arcade feel of the games, they're very atmospheric and the music is always fast and action packed. Mix in a big bag of nostalgia and I'm a happy chap.

How long have you been collecting for?
I'm unsure about this, but at some point in the early Noughties my games stopped just being games that I had accumulated over the years and turned into a serious collection. I'm not sure why either, I don't actually remember deciding that I wanted to collect games, it just kind of happened!

So what, if anything, has eluded you?
A Pioneer CLD A100 LaserActive. I've wanted one for many years now so I could play the Mega LD games but have never had the money available when a decent one has come up for sale. I will get one eventually...

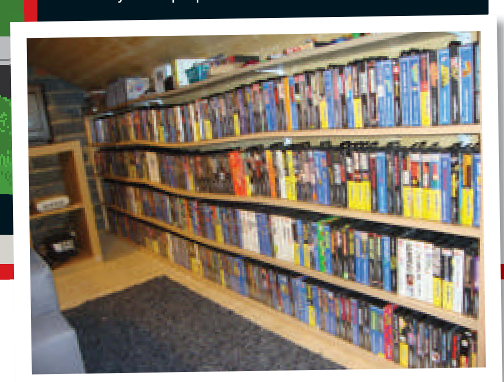
Which one item in your collection could you not live without and why?
Streets Of Rage II, I love that game and although I have it on my phone and PS3 I would never get rid of my original copy that I've had since I was a kid.

What is the most you have spent on a single Mega Drive item and why?
£751 on a blue box copy of *World Championship Soccer 2*, which is a crazy amount to spend on a box I agree, but I needed to have it, I just wasn't happy owning the classics re-release version of the game!

How does your other half feel about your impressive collection?
She quite likes the fact that I have something I am so interested in to keep me busy, but gets annoyed when little piles of games start appearing all over the place!

What advice would you give other readers interested in collecting Mega Drive games?
Do it! It's a great console with so many fun games available for it, and for the most part games are really cheap too. The only real advice I'd give is to buy a Japanese or modified console so you don't exclude yourself from the great imports available.

If you could go back and purchase a single game upon its release, which would it be and why?
Lakers Vs Celtics And The NBA Play Offs. The only PAL Mega Drive game I need a box for, although I'm not sure it actually had a proper release!



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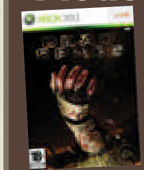
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Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox 360
- **Year Released:** 2008
- **Publisher:** EA
- **Developer:** EA Redwood Shores
- **Key People:** Michael Condrey (senior development director, Glen Schofield (executive producer), Jay Wells (audio engineer)

GO DEEPER

- **Isaac Clarke's name is a combination of the sci-fi authors Isaac Asimov and Arthur C Clarke.**
- **You get to see Isaac's face in the closing moments of the game. He looks about as average as is possible.**

29. DEAD SPACE

Reinventing the survival horror genre in a post-Resi 4 era, Dead Space was a highly refined Western-crafted answer to a Japanese-dominated genre…

THE BACKGROUND

The studio formerly known as EA Redwood Shores, now Visceral Games, built a new property that came with a mythology that lived beyond just one game. *Dead Space* was fostered as a multimedia franchise, with a massive story that would end up spanning an animated film, a comic book and a flash game spin-off. Creating an engine from scratch to facilitate industry-best lighting effects, which would become a key atmospheric device within the game, *Dead Space* was deliberately evocative of a variety of horror and sci-fi movies, which the team were self-confessed fans of.

It came at a key time for EA, when the publisher was trumpeting the merits of new IP – *Dead Space* was given a massive three years to come to fruition, longer than any comparative titles at EA Redwood Shores like *The Simpsons Game* and *The Godfather*. The team prototyped and focus-tested everything to an exhaustive degree, from UI to the extent of the player's powers, honing in on the idea of lead character Isaac's relentless struggle in navigating abandoned spacecraft the USG Ishimura.

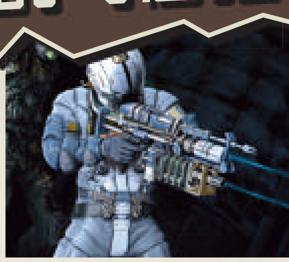
The game was EA's biggest critical hit in years, and despite a slow start, *Dead Space* sold well enough to become a franchise for EA – as a symbol of its creative triumphs, the studio was christened Visceral Games to underline its goal of developing high-level hardcore titles in *Dead Space*'s image. Executive producer Glen Schofield left Visceral in the Summer of 2009 to join Activision, and seemingly conflicted with EA ahead of his departure, later saying this on his Twitter feed: "They really treated me like shit, even after creating *Dead Space* for them."

THE GAME

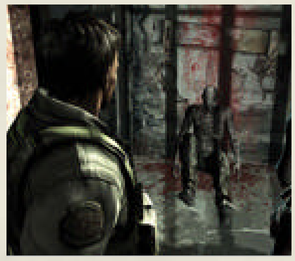
Dead Space is derivative of many sci-fi movies, especially *Alien*; you play an engineer who has the smarts to survive on a spaceship infected with extraterrestrial life. This part, everyone had seen before. The backdrop is pretty straightforward for

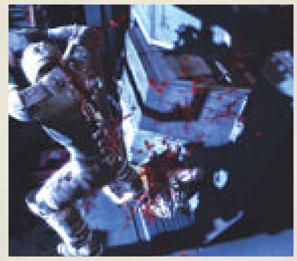
Things of note











Ishimura Animated

The animated movie *Dead Space: Downfall* forms a sharp and beautiful prequel to the events in the game, the first of many cross-media marketing experiments by EA.

Dead Space Diluted?

With its second and third entries, the addition of multiplayer, as well as Isaac's newfound ability to speak risk losing the purity and empathy of the first game.

Isaac Doesn't Speak

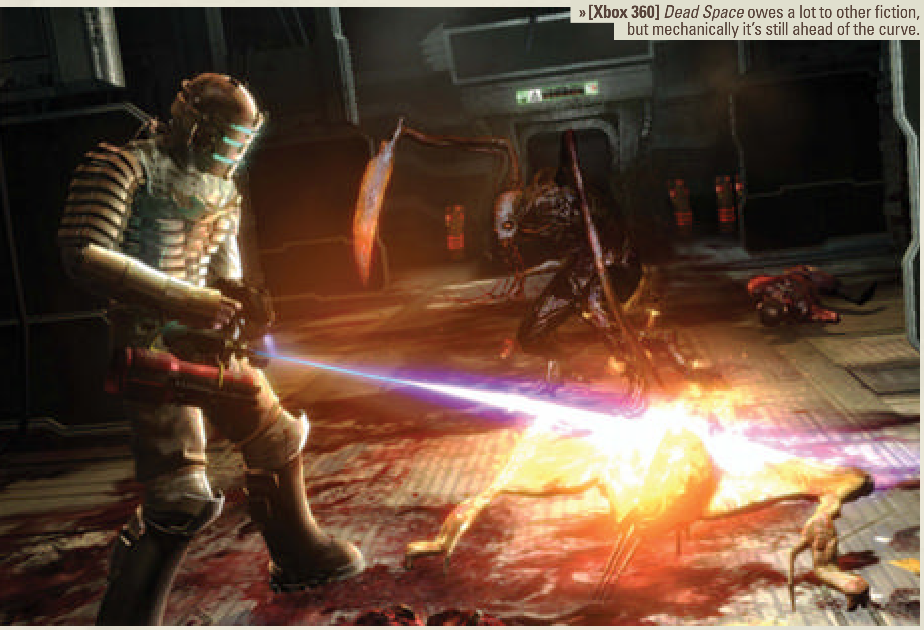
While Isaac never speaks, his colleagues and loved ones do – the silent hero is an age-old gaming trope but it works here, putting the player in the character's shoes.

Dead Space Vs Resi

Being released within six months of each other, *Dead Space* and *Resident Evil 5* were put against each other by critics, with the consensus leaning towards EA's game.

Sound Of Silence

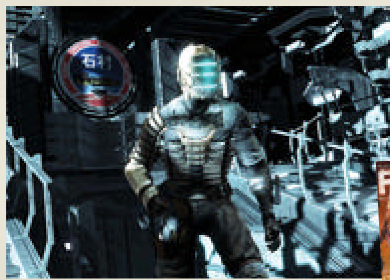
Dead Space got away with having very little soundtrack by using cleverly intense sound design, and rare bursts of effective orchestral music at dramatic points.



» **[Xbox 360]** *Dead Space* owes a lot to other fiction, but mechanically it's still ahead of the curve.

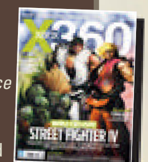


» **[Xbox 360]** Scary in bursts, *Dead Space*'s chapter-by -chapter structure helps renew the tension throughout.

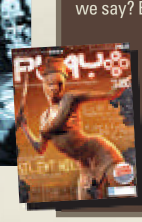


» **[Xbox 360]** Isaac's partly defined by what you put into him – the lack of a voice for the character helps.

What the press thought



X360
Score: 9/10
"There's very little to denounce *Dead Space* with. It captures you completely with chilling suspense and leaves you feeling thoroughly thrilled. What can we say? Bring on a sequel!"



Play
Score: 87%
"*Dead Space* lifts gameplay elements from a variety of sources and ably adapts them."

a horror game, but the execution of the gameplay blends a massive range of innovative mechanics, most notably realistic limb decapitation and antigravity puzzles where you have to consider every dimension of each environment.

There's so much to factor in when contemplating *Dead Space*'s creative achievements, particularly when it comes to the way audiovisual design is used to generate fear in the player; no other game released in the past five years is quite as good at making you identify with the minute-to-minute psychology of your character. It illustrates what only games can achieve as a medium in putting you in that role. The developers achieved this feat of storytelling through minute detail, considering aspects like sound design and event scripting in ways that kept the game from relying on cheap jumpy scares.

Isaac Clarke is a silent character, and by keeping things pretty quiet overall with only an intermittent score, the impact of any sound is therefore elevated. This is a core part of *Dead Space*'s atmosphere. Isaac's breathing patterns are the one sound you always hear, and they escalate as soon as enemy necromorphs swarm upon him, or become panicked when you're low on oxygen – what could've been a gimmicky effect subtly dictates your relationship with everything that's going on around Isaac. No other horror game in history is as good at creating that connection.

But there are many other touches that demonstrate how ahead of its time *Dead Space* was. The simplicity with which Isaac's many different abilities are mapped to the controls made dozens of *Dead Space*'s contemporaries seem suddenly outdated – especially when juggernaut *Resident Evil 5* arrived the next year with clunky controls and a confused HUD. Isaac's health meter is mapped to the spine of his armour. His inventory is accessed by a hologram emanating from the suit. There are no distractions; it's pure forward-thinking design that feels like it's revelling in the HD age, and the advantages that can bring to players.

Visceral created *Dead Space*'s universe from so many sci-fi sources, but the dynamics of its gameplay, the feedback it gives the player and the way the environment is manipulated to trigger a response is entirely refreshing. This is a game that plays with your psychology on subtle levels, but gets the fundamentals right, too, with *Gears Of War*-style twin-stick shooting, smart puzzles that encourage your range of abilities and a narrative structure with all the correct twists built in. *Dead Space* is evolution, not revolution – it's a carefully-considered experience, one fashioned by people who knew how to subvert the genre.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

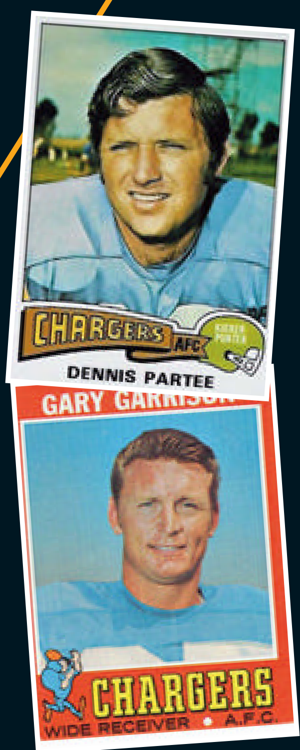
Survival horror was a Japanese-dominated genre throughout the previous two generations, and *Dead Space* brought that to an end by marrying several genres and many existing ideas together, while forging a distinctive aesthetic that set it apart from the space marine shooters on the market. It's a groundbreaking horror title because, as you're reminded every time a limb floats by in zero gravity, or when you're confronted with a black vista of the galaxy while treading the hull of the Ishimura to the soundtrack of Isaac exhaling, this is one of the few times a game has convincingly channelled a high-quality cinematic experience.

Dead Space doesn't try to emulate a movie like so many other cutscene-laden games, but it does use elements of cinema to enhance this fictional universe. There's an interesting contrast here between a story that's relatively derivative and a method of interactive storytelling that's extremely progressive; a great mixture of the old and the new, which encapsulates the mentality behind *Dead Space* very well.

THE MAKING OF

STAR CASTLE

From the original pioneers of vector gaming in the arcades came a truly unique and fast-paced space shooter that combined elements of Asteroids and Breakout. Marty Goldberg joins creators Tim Skelly and Scott Boden to take you behind Star Castle's creation



» Dennis Partee's (top) and Gary Garrison's (bottom) 1975 and 1971 (respectively) American Football trading cards: the co-founders of Cinematronix in 1976.

The story of *Star Castle* begins in the complicated history of the complicated company that created it, Cinematronics. To many readers of Retro Gamer, the name will be far less familiar than other coin-op companies like Atari, Midway, Williams, and Stern. Not surprising, considering that Cinematronics specialised in vector display-driven arcade machines, a unique format influenced by the same display technology previously only available on mainframe and mini-computers – the stomping grounds of the now legendary *Spacewar!* computer game. The technology died out in the arcades after the mid-Eighties, but Cinematronics still remains a legend to fans of vector display games.

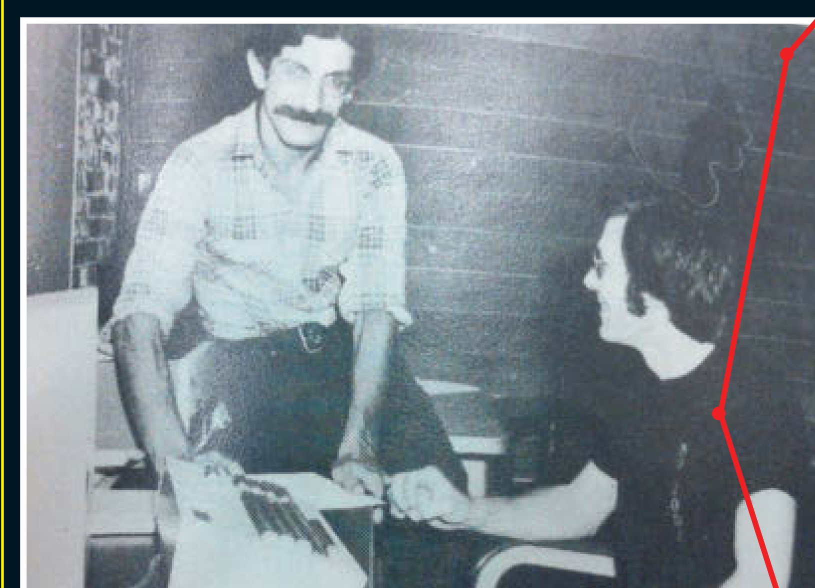
Cinematronics itself was founded on 1 April 1975 in San Diego, California by two soon-to-be-retired American pro-football players, Gary Garrison and Dennis Partee. Bringing in financial partner Jim Pierce, they were looking to be getting into the growing video arcade game business, which seemed to have new companies every other day. Unfortunately, their entry was a string of *Pong*-style clone games at a time when the industry was moving to much more complicated gameplay with more detailed graphics, such as Atari/Kee's *Tank*, *Indy 800* and *Steeplechase,* as well as Taito/Midway's *Gun Fight.*

Losing money and ready to go out of business, the company was saved by an MIT grad named Larry Rosenthal. Following in the grand tradition of Bushnell and Dabney (*Computer Space*) and Pitts and Tuck (*Galaxy Game*), Rosenthal had been looking at a way to bring the game *Spacewar!* to the arcade. Bushnell and Dabney had done it simply by not actually trying, releasing their raster display-driven game that was simply influenced by *Spacewar!* Pitts and Tuck did it by literally putting an expensive mini-computer (the DEC PDP-11) and its vector display-driven terminal stations in cabinets. A mini-computer with a coin slot.

Rosenthal had gone a route similar to Pitts and Tuck, using hardware that could literally play the real *Spacewar!* game. Only in his cased he used TTL (Transistor-Transistor Logic, a digital logic technology used in all pre-microprocessor-based arcade games) based circuitry to recreate the instruction set of the DEC PDP-8 mini-computer and run the PDP-8 version of *Spacewar!*, which he had licenced from MIT. "The game board was a TTL implementation of a PDP 8. It used 74ls181 alu's as the core, and some lookup proms for



» *Flipper*, one of several early *Pong*-style games that were released far after the genre's heyday and almost drove Cinematronics into bankruptcy.



» Larry Rosenthal (left) created the Vectorbeam hardware used at Cinematronics, later creating his own company also called Vectorbeam. Dan Sunday, while employed at Vectorbeam made the demo that inspired Tim Skelly to come up with *Space Duel.*

instruction decoding. The D/A converters for the vector monitors were right off the 12 bit data bus," says *Star Castle* programmer Scott Boden. Calling the technology Vectorbeam, he talked Cinematronics into an unheard of 50/50 split (which was exactly why he was turned down by every other non-desperate company he talked to). They released the game in 1977 as *Space Wars*, and entered arcade history with the first vector display coin-op. About 30,000 coin-ops were built and it was one of the top earning arcade games for operators over the next several years.

"The collaboration was a huge success, but even though they were very happy with their share of the revenues from *Space Wars*, Pierce and Stroud were not so happy with their arrangement with Larry. 50 per cent was (and continues to be) an outrageous share to go to a game developer. Also, in addition to his cut of the profits, Larry retained the application patents to his board, which he licenced to Cinematronics. This meant that he received additional cash for every game, *Space War* or otherwise, that Cinematronics manufactured using his technology," said Star Castle creator Tim Skelly in a 1999 Usenet post.

Tim Skelly, now a legend in the videogame industry, showed up during Autumn 1978 as a young programmer (with only a year of experience) ready to interview for a job. Meeting with Rosenthal, he thought the interview went badly and headed back to home in Kansas City. "Larry seemed to have little interest in my qualifications or anything else about me for that matter." Soon after though, Cinematronics co-owner Jim Pierce told him he had the job, and Tim immediately packed up and took the four-day drive to his new job. Only when he got there, Larry and other key players from Cinematronics were gone! Owning the patent and having the clause that he could leave Cinematronics at any time, Larry had felt he could make even more money by doing his own manufacturing as well, and had left to form his new company, Vectorbeam. Cinematronics suddenly had the lone programmer Tim for their future. The fact that all that was left was Larry's homebrew development system that had to be programmed by hex, and the entire future of the company was now resting on his shoulders, scared the hell out of Tim.

But he rose to the occasion, dug in, and taught himself how to program on the intimidating spartan dev system that had been until that time used to run just one game. First came *Starhawk*, then *Sundance* and what is considered the first released fighting game, *Warrior*.

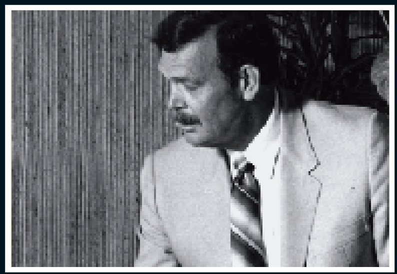
Scott Boden came on board in 1979 at the age of 18 as test tech for coin-op hardware. A self professed high school computer nerd, he was always tinkering with electronics. "I made a ping-pong game out of discrete components



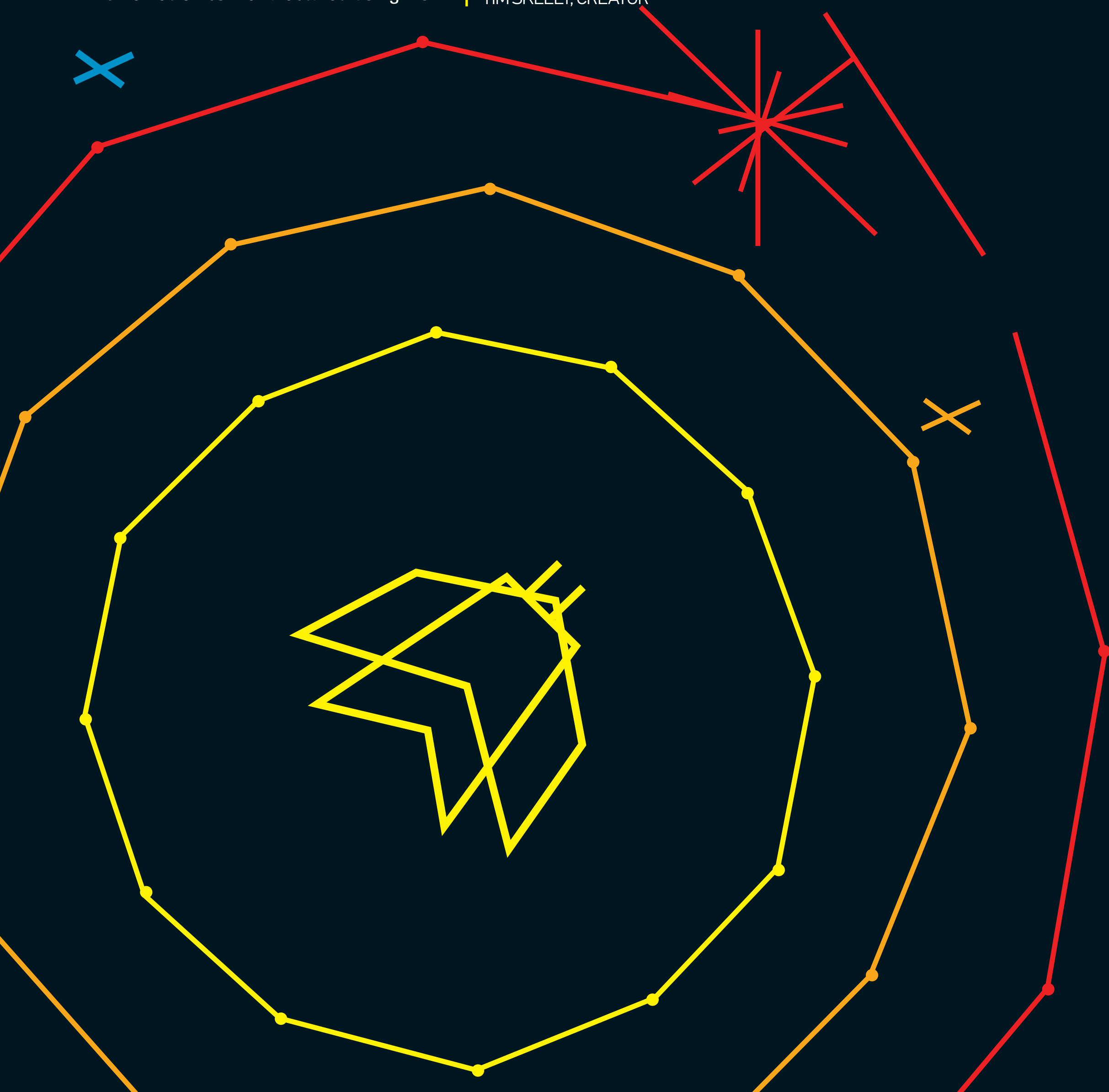
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CINEMATRONICS
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1980
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, VECTREX
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

> 50 per cent was and continues to be an outrageous share to go to a game developer
>
> TIM SKELLY, CREATOR



» Jim Pierce was Cinamatronics' financial partner. He was hired by Gary Garrison and Dennis Partee.

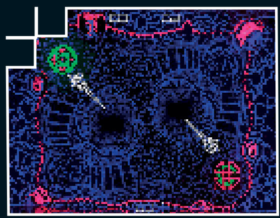


Star Castle: The Vectrex Factor

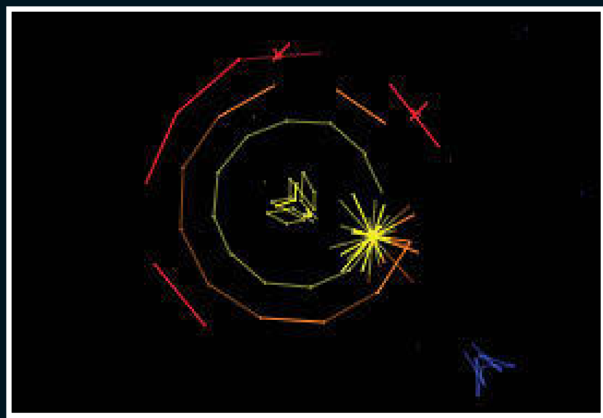


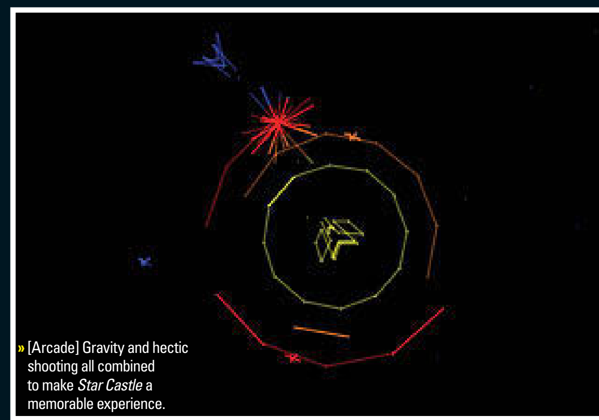
Licenced from Cinematronics and released in 1983, it had been programmed by William Hawkins, then a co-op employee at Western Technologies/Smith Engineering (the creators of the Vectrex) while a student at Georgia Tech. What this conversion has over many other popular games on other consoles at the time is that it's an almost exact duplicate of the coin-op version. Save for the smaller screen and related smaller vector resolution, to most players the look and gameplay are identical. The Vectrex version even takes advantage of the system's ability to use overlays to provide coloured ares on the screen, just like the arcade version does. Providing a great arcade experience in the home, this version of the game may be the only chance most people have to enjoy this game as it was meant to be played: on a crisp vector display. The coin-op is simply all too rare to find.

THE MAKING OF



» [Arcade] That mothership spits out a huge missile, so fly carefully.





» [Arcade] Gravity and hectic shooting all combined to make *Star Castle* a memorable experience.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STARHAWK
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VECTREX
YEAR: 1977

WARRIOR (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

ARMOR ATTACK
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VECTREX
YEAR: 1980

after school while watching television at home, without schematics. I also designed various electronic add in cards for heath computer, such as a Z80A processor card to replace the 8080A card in that system."

Originally fixing broken games (typically *Space Wars*, *Starhawk*, etc), the biggest perk to Scott seemed to be that he was able to play as many free games as he wanted. Wanting to get more experience, however, he soon talked his way into engineering and then into programming. "I already knew how to design and fabricate electronic prototypes. While in engineering I spent a lot of time talking with Tim, and told him I already knew the hardware inside and out, and that I had already done a lot of programming in assembly language. So he got me transferred to the game design department."

Scott's first game was *Clown Skeet*, done to learn the development system which by then had evolved into a DEC PDP-11 with editor/assembler and communications software to upload the game code to the board. Besides needing to learn how to do 3D image transformations with a very limited instruction set. Code debugging, Scott discovered that learning to program vector display hardware was far different than raster; it had its own sets of ins and outs.

"With the vector system used, the game board provided a X and Y position, and a beam on/off/intensity signal. The X and Y signals are two voltages generated by two 12-bit DAC (digital to analog converters) giving 4096 possible positions. To draw a vector, the beam (in the off position) is moved to the starting point of the line, the beam is turned on, and the destination point is then entered into the DAC. The slew rate of the yokes in the vector monitor are only so fast, so it takes time to draw a line. Longer lines take longer time. Moving the beam, even in the off position, takes more time for more distance. Sometimes the graphics were cpu bound, with calculating 3D rotations requiring too much math. And sometimes easy math artwork was limited by taking too much time for the beam to move. I remember moving the beam, doing some math, and hopefully when the calculations were done the beam was ready, wasting as little time as possible."

> There was a circuit breaker in case of extreme failure, but the off switch was quicker
>
> SCOTT BODEN, PROGRAMMER

Luckily Tim was there to show him the ropes, share the source code for previous games, and when ready… give Scott his first real game: *Star Castle*. The idea for *Star Castle* created a scenario similar in some ways to Nolan Bushnell seeing the Magnavox Odyssey's *Tennis* game and giving it to Al Alcorn to expand into what became *Pong*. Shortly after Scott had started at Cinematronics, Larry and his company Vectorbeam ran into hard times of their own and wound up selling out to Cinematronics. "I was tasked with evaluating Vectorbeam's software assets. I flew up to Oakland with some of the Cinematronics techs. This was when I first met Dan Sunday, saw the game that was to become *Tailgunner*, and the demo that inspired *Star Castle*," recalled Tim.

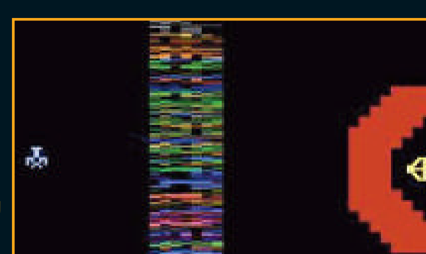
Simple in appearance, it consisted of a ship from *Space War* surrounded by rotating rings filled with blocks. Chased by a flock of "snowflakes," when they collided with the ship's rotating shield, a brick disappeared. When they were all gone, the ship was defenceless and game over. Not very fun on it's own, Tim evolved the concept in to the project he gave Scott. As Tim recalled in the same Usenet post, "Soon, I came up with a way to make Dan and Larry's shield of rings work. I put the enemy inside of the rings and anchored it to the centre. The player would have a free moving ship, and the player's goal was to shoot through the rings and hit the enemy.

"This meant that by shooting out the shield, the player was shooting away the one thing that was protecting them from that nasty gun in the centre. I cut the shield segments down to lines instead of blocks (fewer unnecessary lines) and added more rings. Besides the central cannon, danger to the player came from

» *Star Castle* programmer Scott Boden at the age of 16, about two years before he started at Cinematronics, where he worked his way up from a technician to a programmer.



Yars' Revenge



Star Castle actually gave rise to a very well known cult classic game on the Atari 2600 platform, *Yars' Revenge*. Created by Howard Scott Warshaw of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *E.T.* fame, Howard's first game at Atari was supposed to be a licenced port of *Star Castle*. Realising he simply couldn't do a port in the limited amount of storage space the programmers at Atari were given at the time ("It would suck," Howard said), the game's elements were morphed in to *Yars'*. The enemy ship became the evil Quotile, the rotating shield a static dome, and the hero a bug called a Yar.



» [Arcade] *Space Wars*, created by Larry Rosenthal, saved Cinematronics. Running on a custom hardware mimicking the instruction set of a DEC mini-computer, it ran a licenced version of *Spacewar!* that was literally the same version that ran on DEC mini-computers.



"space mines" that originated in the centre and then hopped outwards from ring to ring, giving the player some time to anticipate their approach." The new idea was to create a frantic pace yet consistent tension.

Scott then set out to program Tim's vision. "I worked out a general outline with Tim, and it was up to me to implement and tweak. There were other things we would have liked to do nicer, but were memory and bandwidth limited. Developing the game was done incrementally. For example: get a ship displayed on the screen… make it rotate… animate jets out the back… make it move… make it wrap around the screen… detect other objects, etc. Every time you added a tiny bit of code you compiled and tried to run it. There were no debug tools. No single step. It was full speed or nothing. So the less you added at one time, it was easier to isolate the problem, since it was most likely something you just added. Also, if you crashed the processor while the display's beam was on, you could blow out the monitor. There was a circuit breaker in case of severe failure, but the off switch was quicker. Most development was done late at night, usually till dawn. Then sleep and repeat. We also played a lot of music after hours. Tim had an extensive music collection – his old girlfriend was a radio DJ."

In all, the code for *Star Castle* took up 8k of storage. Released in late 1980, it enjoyed good earnings and popularity in the arcades. Receiving exactly one official home port (for GCE/Milton Bradley's Vectrex), and a licenced tabletop version by Tiger, it drifted in to relative pop culture obscurity, though it certainly remains a favourite among vector arcade game aficionados!

Special thanks to Keith Smith.

Star Castle Cameos

Star Castle's first cameo was in the now legendary 1982 movie *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*. Serenaded by the Go-Go's *We Got the Beat*, a full screen close-up is shown for all of two seconds before switching to the even more obscure *Lunar Rescue* (Taito 1979).

In 1983, *Star Castle* had another cameo in the easily forgettable videogame movie *Joysticks*. Well, forgettable by everyone except videogame fans! *Star Castle* is sandwiched in between a virtual cornucopia of obscure coin-op titles.

Who ya gonna call? *Star Castle*! Well maybe not, but *Star Castle* has the privilege of being one of three coin-ops chosen by Dr. Peter Venkman, Dr. Raymond Stanz, and Dr. Egon Spengler to adorn their firehouse headquarters in the 1984 film, *Ghostbusters*.

Someone must have had a sense of humour and some inside knowledge when they had *Star Castle* make a cameo appearances in Steven King's 1986 film *Maximum Overdrive*. Vector monitors are notorious for blowing out, and in this case the game electrocutes an unsuspecting player.

An unexpected tribute in a modern game, *Star Castle* is given a tribute in the popular game *Angry Birds Space*. Hidden in the game, it can be accessed through hitting a special target on an asteroid with a castle… taking you to a "castle" in the shape of a star.







» Being a vector game, arcade machines were prone to breaking down. Working machines are now extremely rare.



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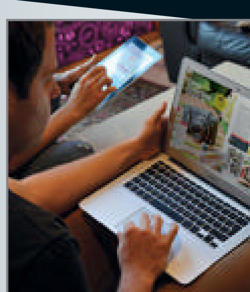


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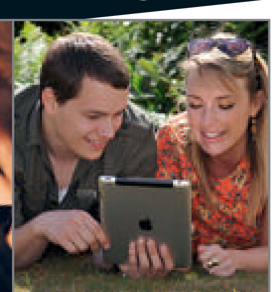
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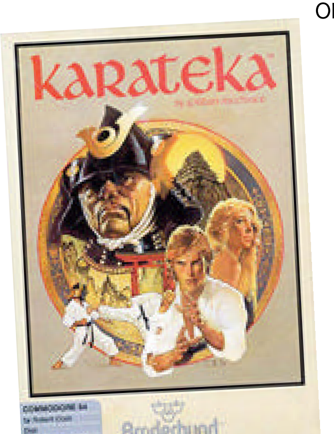


In the chair with...

JORDAN MECHNER

With fresh remakes of The Last Express and Karateka, Jordan Mechner – the developer who also created Prince Of Persia – is back from Hollywood and making games again. He discusses his career and thoughts with David Crookes and we look at why his on-off relationship with gaming hasn't prevented him from making some of the best loved titles of all time

IN 1989, Jordan Mechner created a game called *Prince Of Persia* for one of Apple's earliest machines and, in doing so, made himself very rich and well known among players, who instantly lauded it as a classic. Before that, he'd shifted half a million copies of a fighting game called *Karateka*. And then he put the whole lot into making *The Last Express* and ran out of track, for a little while anyway. This brilliant, Yale-educated games developer dusted himself down, gave the green light to *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time* and then found himself standing in a desert on a Hollywood film set as one of gaming's most influential creators. That he is also incredibly down to earth, facing times of self-doubt as his online diaries attest, also makes him one of the most likeable too.



What was your home life like and how did your schooldays influence you?
I grew up in New York and I didn't much like school as a kid. But I loved to draw and write stories and comic books and I spent a lot of time trying to make animated movies on Super 8 film. I might have stayed on that path if I hadn't stumbled on to computers.

When was that?
When I was a teenager. Videogames didn't appear till I was in junior high school and I didn't get my first computer until I was 14. It was a 16K Apple II.

Can you remember the earliest game you played?
I grew up playing games, but they were tabletop games, like cards and chess and Monopoly. There were pinball machines at the bowling alley, then one day there was something called *Tank War*. It wasn't like 'Oh my god, it's a videogame, this is the future.' It was just an alternative that co-existed with the pinball machines. It didn't seem intrinsically more interesting, only a little different.

Did you enjoy playing games?
Playing the latest game might hold my interest for a few days or weeks but programming the Apple II kept me enthralled for years.

So you enjoyed programming more than playing games?
When I first discovered programming as a kid, I enjoyed it like a game in itself, a pastime that I found endlessly absorbing and challenging.

What was your first stab at programming?
IBM had something called the "Explorers" program where they let kids come in after hours and use their computer terminals. I did a bit of programming in APL and BASIC, but it only really became a full-blown obsession when the Apple II came along.

Why the Apple II?
A friend had one and I would use it at his house after school each day. I saved up to buy my own using all the money I'd earned over the years drawing caricatures at local fairs and from then on, I pretty much spent every spare moment at the Apple. What really hooked me about it was the colour graphics. It wasn't just programming text. Suddenly I could make games that were like little animated movies.

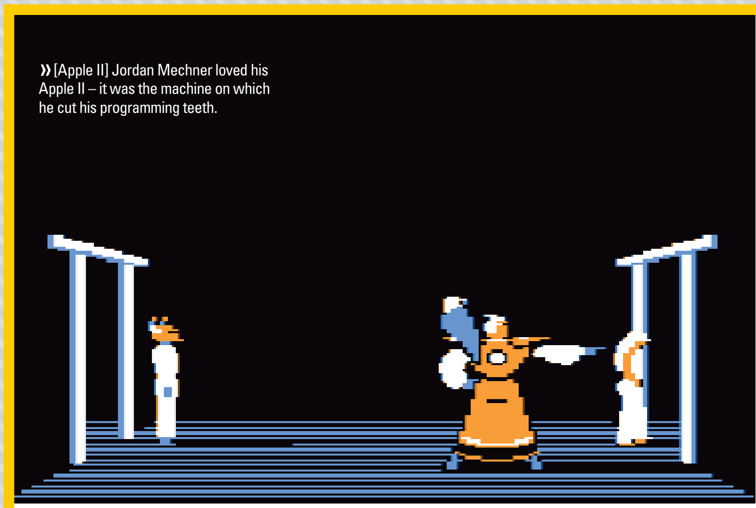
Is that where the idea for *Karateka* came from?
My first game was a shoot-'em-up called *Deathbounce* which I had sent to Broderbund Software for consideration. It didn't like it. But when I saw Broderbund's new number one bestseller, *Choplifter*, it blew me away. Here was a game that went beyond arcade-style racking up points to depict a human, dramatic situation. It had the smoothest, most sophisticated animation I'd ever seen on an Apple



"I grew up playing games, but they were tabletop games, like cards and chess and Monopoly"

SELECTED TIMELINE

Karateka (Apple II) 1984
Prince Of Persia (Apple II) 1989
Prince Of Persia 2: The Shadow & The Flame (Mac/PC) 1993
The Last Express (Mac/PC) 1997
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time (Multi-format) 2003



[Apple II] Jordan Mechner loved his Apple II – it was the machine on which he cut his programming teeth.

II. *Choplifter* inspired me to make a game that would be even more cinematic. And that led to *Karateka*.

What else inspired you?
I took a lot of inspiration from sources other than games. My favorite Kurosawa film, *Seven Samurai*, Hokusai, Japanese woodblock prints. D.W. Griffith, early silent movies and how they used cross-cutting to create suspense. Bruce Lee movies. Disney animation. I look karate lessons at that time as well.

Was it a challenge to program the game – what was most difficult about it?
The hardest thing was finishing. I was 18, *Karateka* was the biggest project of any kind I'd taken on. It took two and a half years to finish.

What was the turning point when developing *Karateka*?

I decided to try rotoscoping. I'd begun trying to draw the frames by hand, but it just looked like programmer animation and it was not nearly good enough for what I was dreaming of. I used Super 8 film to shoot my mom's karate teacher doing punches and kicks, and then traced the outlines into the computer.

How did you balance studying at Yale with developing *Karateka*?
Not very well. It's a miracle that I actually graduated.

Rotoscoping was very much your hallmark at the time. Did the technology restrain you, though?
Designing the games to fit in the 48K of Apple II memory was a huge constraint that influenced every aspect of the game design. Later, this yielded an unexpected benefit: because the game was so compact, it was able to be ported later to a huge variety of computer and console systems around the world, many of which also had tight technical constraints.

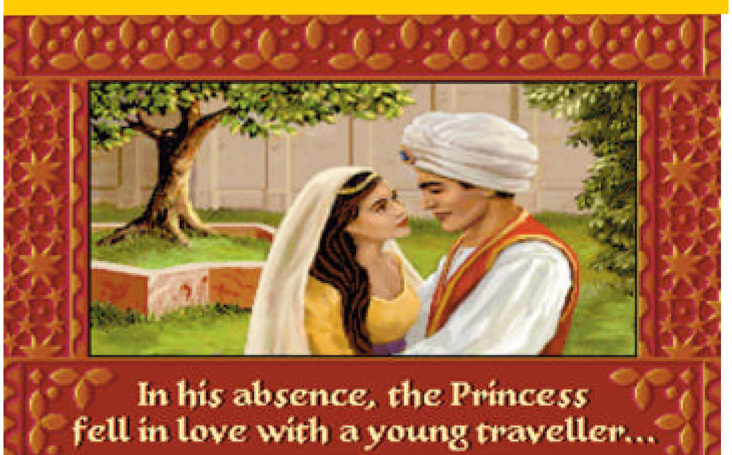


When you created *Prince Of Persia*, did you have more flamboyant ideas for the game?
Part of my original plan for *Prince Of Persia* was to include the level editor on the disk, so players could create their own *Prince Of Persia* levels, as Broderbund had done with *Lode Runner* a few years earlier. I spent months creating a full-featured, user-friendly level editor – but in the end, the only person who got to enjoy using it was me.

You were only 21 at the time. Did you find yourself maturing as a games developer?
I just graduated from college. I was 21 when I started the first *Prince Of Persia* and my idea was to take the fluid action and presentation of *Karateka* and combine that with a puzzle solving game. That was really the primary inspiration for *Prince Of Persia* – that and, as I said before, movies like the first ten minutes of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, with that kind of running, jumping action, where you feel like the hero is in great danger and escapes by the skin of his teeth. I wanted to bring that kind of excitement to the platform.

Films are very much your thing. Are you a fan of technology or do you see it as a means to an end?
As you might guess, since all my games and books have been period pieces, I like old things. Ironically, I think I'm most fond of technological marvels once the world has moved on and they've become artifacts of the past – like steam locomotives, as in *The Last Express*, or the manual typewriter, or the Apple II. Maybe 20 years from now, I'll have the same nostalgia for my iPhone.

> "I think I'm most fond of technological marvels once the world has moved on and they've become artifacts of the past"



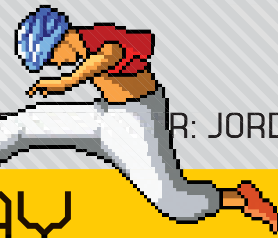
[PC] Mechner was asked to create the sequel to *Prince Of Persia* and oversaw its production.

For the second game, you directed the game more than being hands on, is that right?
For the first game I made and remade the levels so many times over a period of three years and the second game had a much more conventional, sort of a planned development. I worked with a team of programmers and I sort of directed the game remotely. I was living in Paris at the time, making a short film. I wasn't there 12 hours a day for the development. With the second game, I pretty much made a couple of drafts of each level and that was it. I had to stick to the schedule.

***Prince Of Persia* was a well-ported game but were you heavily involved in converting your early games to other formats?**
In the Eighties, it was very important to find the right programmer to do a port. Each system – Apple, Commodore, Atari – had its own quirks and tricks, and good programmers who knew how to extract the most from the machine were much in demand. Typically, doing a port was a one-man operation, and could take months or even years.

Did you design your games with ports in mind?
As an Apple II game author, I was well aware that the ultimate fate and commercial success of my game would depend largely on the quality of the ports. There were horror stories about games that failed or never even shipped on an important platform because the programmer it was entrusted to didn't deliver.

How concerned were you about this happening to your games?
If you read my old journals from the period of *Karateka* and *Prince Of Persia*, you can see what a huge concern it was to me at the time that the ports be done well. With *Karateka*, I was lucky to have Robert Cook do both the Commodore 64 and Atari 400/800 ports. He was a rare programmer who was also a game creator in his own right



(*Gumball, D/Generation*) and had a great eye for detail in graphics and sound. My dad re-orchestrated the Apple II music for the Commodore and Atari versions, to take advantage of the better sound capability of those machines.

Were the ports crucial for the success of *Prince Of Persia*?
It's thanks to the various ports that *Prince Of Persia* survived and is still remembered today. With *Prince Of Persia*, a few years later, the PC port was done by an internal Broderbund team with Lance Groody as programmer, and it took full advantage of what the PC could do that the Apple couldn't, including VGA graphics, sound and music. The Mac version went even further, with different versions of the graphics for every type of Mac screen – black and white, colour, LC (this was 1992), and it was really on those platforms that *Prince Of Persia* took off. The original Apple II version didn't actually sell many copies, because the Apple II was a dead platform by the time the game released in 1989.

When you formed a studio to make *The Last Express*, at what stage in your career do you consider yourself to have been?
After *Prince Of Persia* shipped, I felt burned out on making games. Career-wise, you could say I was on top of the world – I'd had two consecutive hits, starting with *Karateka* – but I was keenly aware that I'd been glued to a computer screen for most of the last decade, from age 15 to 25. I wanted my life to change. I felt that to keep growing creatively and as a human being, I needed to sink my teeth into something that wasn't pixels and games.

What did you do?
I took a big step back from making games. I spent two years travelling, lived in Spain and France, wrote a screenplay, made a 16mm film in Cuba. I supervised the *Prince Of Persia* sequel, *The Shadow & The Flame*, from a distance. I didn't know if I'd do another game, or be a filmmaker, or when I'd go back to the US. And then came *The Last Express*, and suddenly I knew I wanted to make a game again, very badly.

***The Last Express* was written with your friend, Tomi Pierce, wasn't it?**
It was. He had said to me: "I was taking the night train to Berlin…" and there it was. An adventure game set on a train. It's an enclosed space,

* FIVE TO PLAY

Or if we're being honest, four to play and another one to compare the difference between a game with Jordan's involvement and one without. See if you can spot the odd one out…

THE LAST EXPRESS



JORDAN MECHNER HAD, by this point, proven himself to be one of the masters of platform-adventure puzzlers, but he wanted to try his hand at a point-and-click-style adventure set on the Orient Express in 1914.

Costing his new company, Smoking Car Productions, more than £3 million, it was an exquisite game. Its real-time, non-linear nature, played against a backdrop of political intrigue and crime drew upon the rotoscoping legacy of *Prince Of Persia* and also the Virtual Theatre engine, which allowed characters to live their lives independently of the player. It had been used to great effect in Revolution Studios' *Lure Of The Temptress* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*, and was used brilliantly in *The Last Express* as well, but in terms of sales, the game bombed.

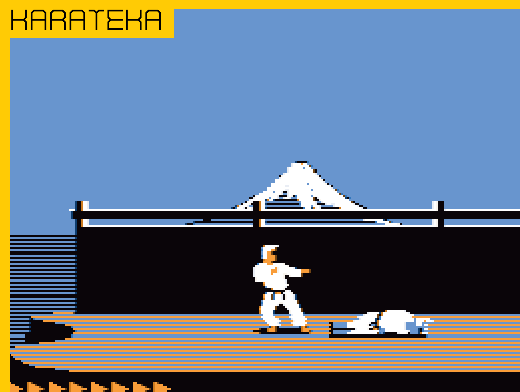
This was due to the marketing department at Brøderbund having quit weeks before the game was released and The Learning Company buying Brøderbund and deciding not to bother with games. Interplay bought the rights in 2000 but it went bankrupt a short while later.

PRINCE OF PERSIA



KARATEKA HAD SOLD a staggering 500,000 copies on various formats so little wonder that Mechner was courted for another game. In walked *Prince Of Persia*, a game that looked as fabulous on 8-bit machines as it did on more advanced computers (and had CPC owners trying to convince others that the machine wasn't too far behind the Atari ST). The playground mutterings were worth the hype, though, as the hand-to-hand fighting of *Karateka* was handed a sword and lots of platforms to leap around to produce the smash hit game of 1989 (and later on the multitude of other platforms on to which it was ported). It taxed the brain with its button-pressing puzzles, razor sharp traps and collapsing floors, and ensured RSI with incredible acrobatic manoeuvres.

KARATEKA



SO IMPRESSED WAS a young John Romero when he played *Karateka*, that he wrote Mechner a letter telling him so. That the great *Doom*-creator thought it was a "tremendous job", however, pales into insignificance when you consider what the game introduced: the little matter of rotoscoping, which stood Mechner well in his game-making career. In tracing over real-life film footage, Mechner was able to create fluid animation with realistic-looking characters and it lifted the game above most of its competitors. Inspired by his love of animation, at its heart it was a rather simplistic fighter. Fact fans should note that Jordan's father, an accomplished classical concert pianist, composed the game's music.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D



ALTHOUGH JORDAN MECHNER isn't a major fan of this game and doesn't see it as part of the *Prince Of Persia* collection, it is worth mentioning for the poor controls and terrible camera, and also for being a *Prince Of Persia* game that the original creator had nothing to do with other than allow it to be made. It is included here, however, as a chance to look at a *Prince Of Persia* game that had the very minimal of Mechner involvement. Indeed, he barely even played the game either since the PC version allowed him to reach only the second level due to a rather poor machine and various technical issues. There had been a rush to get this game launched thanks to Brøderbund being on the verge of going bust.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME



AS THE GAME that went on to influence the film, this was Mechner's chance to revisit the world he created. President of French publishing giant Ubisoft had called him to say he wanted to reboot *Prince Of Persia* for a new generation of fans. Mechner granted permission and became the game's designer, writer and creative consultant. At the same time he realised he could do more and this is when his love of film was kindled. He was able to use this refresh to go to Hollywood and pitch the game as a movie. Producer Jerry Bruckhheimer loved it, bought the film rights and so it proved that *Prince Of Persia* finally opened the kinds of doors that Mechner had always dreamed of.





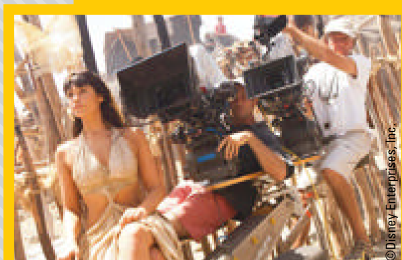
» [Xbox] Mechner was thrilled when *Prince Of Persia* was given a makeover and reboot on the original Xbox.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Jordan's a busy man but he found time to answer a few of your questions posted on the **Retro Gamer** forum, looking at topics as varied as pronunciation, movies and graphic novels



Are there any unfinished or unseen projects you can reveal? *Merman*
I'm very excited about my first original graphic novel, *Templar*, a trilogy about the medieval Knights Templar, which is due to be published in the US next summer by First Second Books. The first book of the trilogy was published under the title *Solomon's Thieves*. It's a full-colour, 480-page tome. Artists LeUyen Pham and Alex Puvilland have done some fantastic work and I'm immensely proud of it.



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What is the correct pronunciation for *Karateka*? I've heard Jordan call it Kara-Teeka in interviews and this aligns with the US TV ad for it. In turn, some US players have followed that example. Everyone else I've heard pronounces it Karate-Ka, since this matches our known use of the Karate prefix. *Antiriad2097*
I say Car-a-TAY-kuh, but the only ones who really pronounce it correctly are Japanese speakers. Earl Newton cut together a funny little video about the different ways people pronounce.

Was *Prince Of Persia* the movie successful enough for a sequel to be considered? As one of the better game to movie adaptations I'd like to see it revisited. *Merman*
Prince Of Persia the movie grossed $335 million worldwide, which makes it the top-grossing videogame-based movie to date.



and it's moving. You're an American abroad, an innocent who's landed in this train full of sinister passengers with plots and conspiracies and eve-of-war intrigue, and the game is to figure out what's going on and stay alive. I loved those kind of thrillers – *The Third Man*, Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* – and instantly I knew this would be my next game. The second idea, which immediately followed the first, was to make it the eve of World War I, rather than WWII because that was an era that hadn't been much explored, and I found it absolutely fascinating.

So where were you living at this point of your career?
I moved back to San Francisco and started putting together the Smoking Car team. I wanted people who were passionate, who'd get excited about making a game that was different.

Had France inspired you?
I loved the European comics I'd discovered while living in France – Hugo Pratt, Enki Bilal, great stuff I'd never seen growing up in New York.

And this translated itself into *The Last Express*?
I wanted the game to have a distinctive art style that would at the same time be evocative of 1914. Nicki Tostevin and Robert Cook worked on developing a digital rotoscope process for live-action footage, and Donald Grahame got started building a 3D model of the Orient Express. We wanted the characters to look like animated pen and ink drawings come to life, against these painterly, hyper-realistic rendered backgrounds.

As you say, you like old things so did you take time to research the past with your games? To what lengths would you go?
We were determined to recreate the 1914 Orient Express with as much historical accuracy as we could, so we went back to Europe to try to track down the surviving train cars. This was 1993, still the relatively early days of CGI. Though we didn't know it at the time, James Cameron was engaged in a similar project trying to recreate Titanic. The French railway company, Wagons-Lits, told us they'd cleared out and destroyed their pre-WWI archives just a few years previously. We were in despair.

Then one day, Patrick Ladislav, our 3D art director, got a call from a old man, a retired train employee, in response to a classified ad we'd placed a month earlier. It turned out that he and his friends had taken the archives home, because they couldn't bear to see them destroyed. They had the floor plans, conductors' manuals, everything we needed. We realised we weren't just making a game, we were preserving a piece of history that might otherwise have vanished forever.

Given that you had become tired following *Prince Of Persia*, were you frustrated at how long *The Last Express* was taking?
Originally, we planned the game development to take 18 months. It ended up taking four years.

Do you think mistakes were made?
We were young and inexperienced, especially at managing a complex project with many people. So we constantly underestimated how long things would take. And we were developing new technology, attempting things that hadn't been done before.

Do you feel that you can you be your own worst enemy?

It wouldn't have been possible for the project to escalate the way it did, and get so big and ambitious, if the person in charge hadn't been a crazy person who kept saying yes, repeatedly okaying more months and more spending, when a normal responsible studio head would have said no. And that crazy person was me. By the time *The Last Express* shipped, I'd put every cent I had into the game, including my savings from *Karateka* and *Prince Of Persia*. I don't regret it, but I wouldn't exactly advise it as a model for others to follow.

NUMBER *CRUNCHING

1964: the year Jordan Mechner was born

4: years spent at Yale University

1: the number of people who produced Karateka (just Mechner)

17: the age when Mechner wrote Karateka

48k: the amount of Apple II memory available to Mechner for Karateka

4: number of platforms on which Karateka has been remade (XBLA, PSN, Steam, iOS)

1: Prince Of Persia was the first game to use rotoscoping and it's in the Guinness World Records

60: number of minutes Prince Of Persia had on the clock

8: awards handed to Prince Of Persia: The Sands of Time

30: people working on The Last Express

17,000,000: games sold to date

Again, you looked to push the boundaries. We'd had rotoscoping and now there was the real time nature of *The Last Express*. Was this ahead of its time?
At the time, we thought our biggest technical innovations were the digital rotoscope – we even got a patent for it – and compositing the animation with the 3D modeling and rendering. But all that's been superseded by later technology.

What do you think stands out, in a technology sense, from your career to date?
The innovation that remains most meaningful today is, I think, the real-time interactive storytelling. Having 30 characters moving through the game on their own timetables, with the potential to be affected by the player's actions and also to affect each other. No game has done that since. And for good reason – because it's really hard, and just as expensive and time-consuming now as it was in 1997.

So what is more important to you: story or gameplay?
The Last Express is unique of all the games I've done, in that the story is the gameplay. In *Karateka*, *Prince Of Persia, Sands of Time*, the flow comes from the action, the challenge of getting from A to B. The story, the fiction, is there to support that. In *The Last Express*, the primary gameplay is discovering the story and characters. It's a much more meditative kind of experience.

How important are sales figures? *Prince Of Persia* did incredibly well but *The Last Express* didn't…
To sustain ourselves through the huge effort of production, I'd willed myself into believing that *The Last Express* would be the next *Myst* – that we'd sell millions of copies, even though no other point-and-click adventure had ever come close to that level. Of course I was disappointed when that didn't happen. But what was more important was that we finished it – that we succeeded in making the game we set out to make, against almost insurmountable odds. Even at the time, that mattered much more than how many copies we sold.

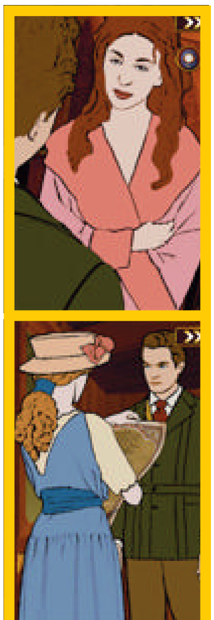


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» On the set of the *Prince Of Persia* film, currently the highest-grossing videogame movie created.

But you have been dusting your games off and given them a much-deserved second airing, starting with *The Last Express* and then *Karateka*. Why have you been doing this?
It's been incredibly rewarding over the years to hear from *The Last Express* and *Karateka* fans and to realise that the games touched so many people, much more than I realised at the time. I'm thrilled that iOS offers a new possibility, something we couldn't have been envisioned in the Eighties and Nineties but really, the ideal platform for it.

Has it been strange going back?
The iOS port [of *The Last Express*] was a great excuse for me to sit down and play the whole game again for the first time in 15 years. I was delighted to discover that not only did I enjoy it but that iOS is now far and away my favourite way to play it. I played it on a long transatlantic flight, with headphones, and finished it in my living room. Somehow the nature of this particular game just feels more congenial to me settling into a comfy chair than sitting in front of a computer. It's very different from the other iOS games I play, in that it's not a quick addictive fix. It's more like a good novel that I want to take time and relax with – meandering, exploring and eavesdropping on the characters.



» [iOS] *Prince Of Persia*, *Karateka* and *The Last Express* have now been ported to iOS.

Do you wish that back then you'd had the resources that are available to you now?
Yes, there were a few things we couldn't do on PC at the time because of the processor burden, which we've been able to do for iOS. One seemingly small change in *The Last Express* but which really makes a big difference and helps the player stay oriented, is that now when you turn, the image slides off to the left or right.

Why is there such great interest in older games?
I think the games we played at different ages accumulate special meaning to us, because they connect us back to the time in life when we first experienced them. Revisiting a game years later brings back memories of not just the game itself, but a chance to reflect on how it affected us, the people in our lives we shared it with, the person we were then. It's much like re-reading a book or re-watching a movie from childhood. The things we've enjoyed and shared with others become a part of who we are, and then we can take pleasure in sharing them with others.

Karateka is available on several platforms as a HD remake, while *Prince Of Persia* can be played on the iPhone and iPad, XBLA, and the Wii's Virtual Console. *The Last Express* is now on iOS.

> "By the time The Last Express shipped, I'd put every cent I had into the game, including my savings from Karateka and Prince Of Persia"

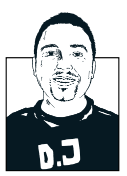




Eye Of The Beholder 2: The Legend Of Darkmoon

DUNGEONS AND LOADINGS

RETROREVIVAL



» AMIGA
» WESTWOOD ASSOCIATES
» 1992

***Eye Of The Beholder* was a huge success for Westwood Associates, cleverly blending the 3D corridor-based exploring of *Dungeon Master* with the official *Dungeons & Dragons* licence.**

For its 1991 sequel (the Amiga port arrived a year after the DOS version) Westwood really pushed the boat out delivering an epic RPG that exceeded the original in every way. Running on an enhanced version of the original engine, *The Legend Of Darkmoon* allowed you to import your heroes from the original game and boasted greatly enhanced visuals and far better dungeon design.

Although it was once again set in a single location, the mysterious Darkmoon temple, the sequel featured outside locations and far better variety due to much of your adventure being set in the bowels of the corrupt temple and three large towers.

Improvements continued with better thought out puzzles, far more interesting enemies – although you'll initially find yourself dealing with a large number of different humans — and some truly devious puzzles. There's a solid range of interesting NPC, making *The Legend Of Darkmoon* a far more satisfying game to play than its excellent predecessor.

As with *Eye Of The Beholder*, the death of your characters would come often and quickly in *Darkmoon*, so making regular saves throughout your adventure was a must. We'd also recommend taking one proper healer down, or you'll be waiting forever before your party is fully healed. And grab some graph paper, you'll really need it.

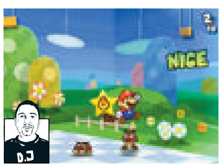
One thing that's worth noting is that while the Amiga version is a very good port, it does pale in comparison to the DOS version, particularly the CD-ROM offering. Loads come quickly and often on the 16-bit machine, require annoying changes that do break the flow of the adventure a bit. I originally purchased a second floppy drive due to the excruciating loading times, and it sadly hasn't gotten any better with age. Stick with it though as this is arguably the best use of the *D&D* licence on a 16-bit system and easily the best *D&D* game of all time. At least until *Baldur's Gate* came along…

RETRORATED

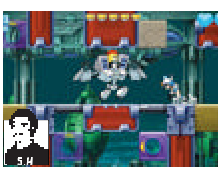


>> It's always slow this time of year, but we've still found a collection of games for you. Midway Arcade Origins is a real disappointment due to emulation issues, but Paper Mario: Sticker Star has proven to be plenty of fun, if a little different to previous entries

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Paper Mario: Sticker Star
It's not as much of an RPG as past games in the series, but it's still a fun little adventurer.



STUART
Mighty Switch Force! Hyper Drive Edition
WayForward has done a great job porting this to Wii U. Looks glorious, plays brilliantly.



DAVID
Paper Mario: Sticker Star
Despite its heavier focus on combat, I've still enjoyed Mario's latest paper outing.

Midway Arcade Origins

GREAT GAMES, GREAT PRICE, FRUSTRATING CONTROLS

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £19.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** WARNER BROS
- » **DEVELOPER:** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

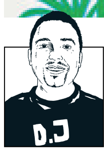
BRIEF HISTORY

» Backbone Entertainment was formed in 2003, the result of a merger between Digital Eclipse and ImaginEngine. Digital Eclipse had specialised in emulation, creating the likes of *Midway Arcade Treasures, Activision Hits Remixed, Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* and many more. ImaginEngine specialised in creating software for children, with a particular focus on the PC.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

720
A.P.B.
Arch Rivals
Bubbles
Championship Sprint
Defender
Defender II
Gauntlet
Gauntlet II
Joust
Joust 2
Marble Madness
Pit-Fighter
Rampage
Rampart
Robotron: 2084
Root Beer Tapper
Satan's Hollow
Sinistar
Smash TV
Spy Hunter
Spy Hunter II
Super Off Road
Super Sprint
Toobin'
Total Carnage
Tournament Cyberball 2072
Vindicators Part II
Wizard Of Wor
Xenophobe
Xybots





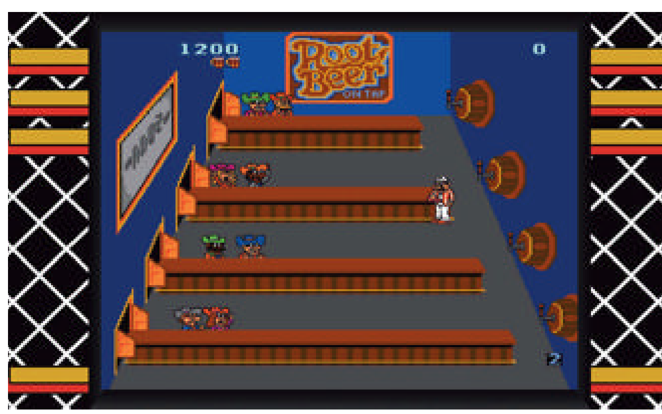
Backbone Entertainment has created some cracking conversions in the past, so it's somewhat disappointing to learn that *Midway Arcade Origins* feels so lacking.

There are a large number of games on *Midway Arcade Origins*, 31 in fact, but once you start looking at the individual titles it becomes a little less impressive. There are two versions of *Joust, Defender, Gauntlet, Spy Hunter*, while titles like *Super Sprint* and *Championship* feel extremely similar to each other. As a result the list starts to feel a little diminished as you end up playing variations of the same games.

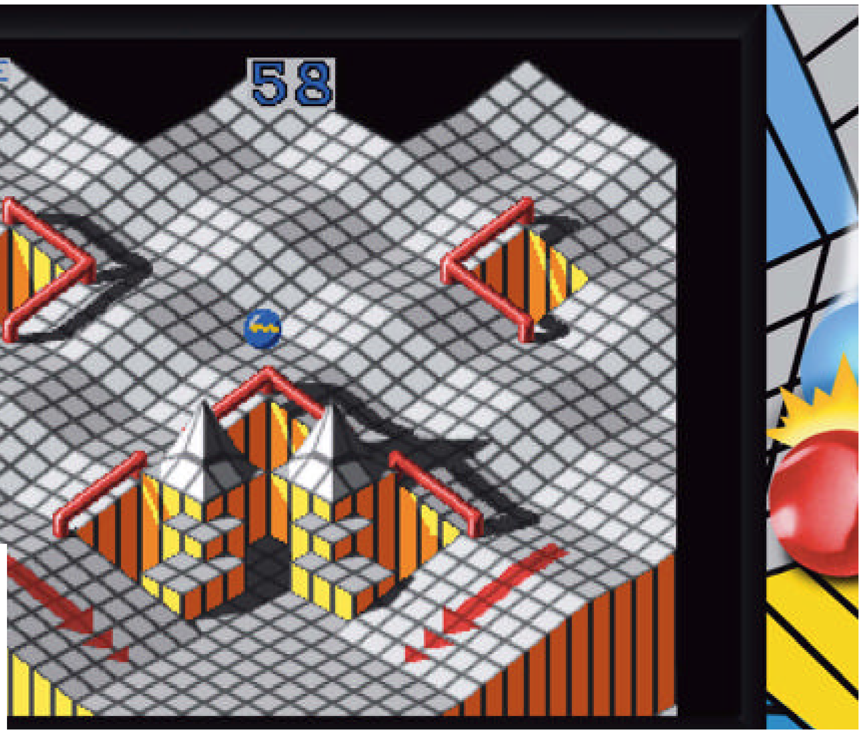
It becomes more galling when you realise that plenty of classics from the previous *Midway Arcade Treasures* series, like *Paperboy, Klax, Roadblasters, Mortal Kombat II, S.T.U.N Runner* and *Primal Rage* are nowhere to be seen. It's almost as if Midway are cynically holding games back so they can release a second compilation at a later date (especially when you consider that many of these games were once available individually on Xbox Live Arcade). Of course we can understand that businesses of all kinds need to make money, and while the mixture of games on offer is for the most part decent, it seems strange that so many key titles are missing.

Another disappointment is the way many of the games control. The likes of *Super Sprint* and *Championship* have always been skittish via emulation, but some of the games included here border on the unplayable. *720, Marble Madness* and anything else that originally relied on trackball support are a complete pig to play here, thanks to oversensitive controls that make them extremely difficult to play. Control issues are also prevalent on the likes of *Smash TV* and *Robotron: 2084* and *Total Carnage*. It feels like these games are using four-way digital controls on the analogue sticks, which makes precise movement and firing extremely hard to pull off. It's acutely noticeable in all three games and mars the enjoyment of them. We've also had issues on the likes of *Toobin'* and *Tournament Cyberball 2072* where the controls suddenly changed for no apparent reason.

Interestingly, we went back to both *Midway Arcade Treasures* and played the Xbox Live Arcade versions of the likes of *Defender, Robotron* and *Smash TV*, and they all play better in their past forms, with none of the control issues that are noticeable here. These sticky controls are particularly baffling on the likes of *Robotron*, as the original Xbox Live Arcade conversions were also by Backbone (when it was known as Digital Eclipse). We're sure



» [Xbox 360] *Root Beer Tapper* is another fun game that isn't let down by any control issues. We're still rubbish at it though.







OPINION



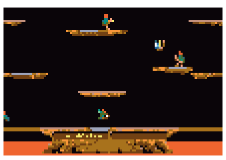
There's a nice selection of varied games on this pack, ranging from sports games, racers and shooters, and the price point is right too, but for me the controls just kill the experience. Playing the twin-stick shooters in this collection can be really frustrating, and the absence of online multiplayer is also disappointing. These games deserve so much better.

Stuart Hunt

✱WHY NOT TRY

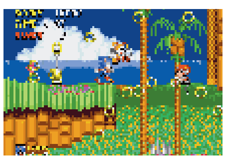
▼ SOMETHING OLD

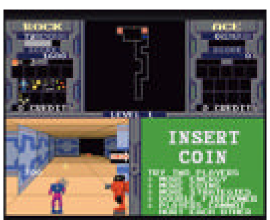
DIDDY KONG RACING (N64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

SEGA MEGA DRIVE ULTIMATE COMPILATION (XBOX 360)





Different ways to play

One of the most interesting aspects of *Midway Arcade Origins* is that it features two distinct gameplay modes. Free-Play is exactly that, giving you infinite credits on any game that you care to play. It's also possible to change certain parameters ranging from starting lives to difficulty. It's worth noting however that online leaderboards aren't activated here, meaning you won't be able to post insane scores. If you do want your scores to be taken seriously then you need to choose Score Attack mode, which doesn't let you continue and stops you from making any gameplay changes. See you online…

these control issues can be rectified with a simple patch, but it's amazing that they slipped through play testing.

While the controls range from poor to great, the overall aesthetic emulation is of a much better standard, but still far from perfect. Many of the included games look very good, with the HD display allowing you to witness every last pixel in all its digitised glory. There are additional filters included, but as these actually make each game worse (typically smoothing out those glorious pixels so that sprites look like blobs of colour, they're best avoided. Sound for the most part is also good, but we occasionally found some of the brilliantly catchy soundtracks being drowned out by their FX (something we didn't notice in the original arcade games or on past compilations). There are no options to change the parameters here, so you're basically stuck with efforts that range from excellent to average.

One way where Backbone has stayed true to the origins of the original arcade games is their lack of online play. While there are online leaderboards, the inability to play these games online with friends feels like a real oversight. Yes it's just how you would have experienced the game originally, but this is 2013, and many gamers will expect online support, when it can make such a big difference to the core gameplay. The leaderboards go some way to reigniting the old high score chasing of old, but it still feels lazy on Backbone's part.

And that's perhaps are biggest issue with *Midway Arcade Origins*. It just feels so phoned in. Some of these games are the best examples of their genres, but you wouldn't have thought so based on the treatment they've received here. The front end presentation with replications of the original arcade games admittedly looks nice, but the extras that have been so noticeable on past compilations are nowhere to be seen here. There were lots of interviews on the *Midway Arcade Treasures* compilations, so it's strange that they've not been included here.

Midway Arcade Origins has a decent selection of games, ranging from the brilliant like *Robotron* and *Joust*, to the downright awful (*Pit-Fighter* and *Arch Rivals*, we're looking at you) and a great price point; but it's been put together in such a slap dash way that it's hard to get excited by it. A sadly disappointing compilation that could have been superb with just a few subtle tweaks.

In a nutshell

There's a decent selection of games, but clunky controls, a few poor spots of emulation and an overall lack of love means it's hard to get too excited about Backbone's game. Here's hoping things improve if a sequel gets released.

>> Score **58%**



» [Xbox 360] *Smash TV* is let down by infuriating controls.

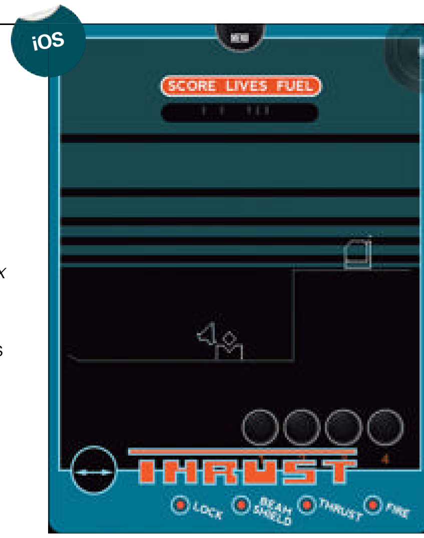


» [Xbox 360] You'll need Jedi-like reflexes in order to handle the tight corners of *Championship Sprint.*

>> VECTREX REGENERATION

THE BEST REVIVAL SINCE THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR

Vectrex Regeneration



INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IOS (IPAD VERSION REVIEWED)
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £4.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** RANTMEDIA GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» The Vectrex was originally released in 1982 and came with *Minestorm*, a built-in clone of *Asteroids*. The machine was launched in November 1982, but became a victim of the videogame crash. The machine is now very collectable and has strong homebrew support.





Ever since *Vectrex Regeneration* was first announced we've been eagerly awaiting the finished product. Rantmedia Games has not disappointed, and while there are some inevitable control issues through playing on an iPhone, it remains a superb little compilation that deserves a download.

By far the most impressive aspect of *Vectrex Regeneration* is its actual emulation. While it can't quite capture the phosphorous glow the original screen gave off, it's otherwise spot on, with authentic sounds – including that background hum – and sharp flickery visuals that will make you think you've stepped back to the early Eighties. It's a superb achievement that works exceptionally well on iPad, due to its close approximation to the screen on the original machine.

Controls aren't as precise, but this is due to the format rather than any issues on the part of Rantmedia Games. It's included all manner of options ranging from adjusting the sensitivity to moving buttons around and once you find set-ups you're happy with, the vast majority of the included games are perfectly playable. It's worth noting however that games become more of an ordeal when played on an iPhone due to the smaller playing area, making everything cramped and awkward. *Vectrex Regeneration* really comes into its own on an iPad with iCade support (part of the £4.99 upgrade) as all those controls issues disappear completely.

Vectrex Regeneration also benefits from a solid selection of games. The Free App download nets you *Minestorm* and four indie games, one of which is an excellent conversion of *Thrust*, while the £4.99 in-app purchase unlocks an additional 17 games. The games themselves are of a high quality (but heavily focused on shooters) with slick conversions of *Scramble*, *Berzerk*, *Star Castle* and *Pole Position*, as well as originals like *Starhawk*, *Bedlam* and *Armor Attack*. There are a couple of duff sports games (*Blitz* and *Heads Up*) but the wheat outweighs the chaff.

It's all wrapped up in some excellent presentation – designed to look like a bedroom from the Eighties – which adds online leaderboards, achievements, cool promotional videos of classic adverts and cool reproductions of each game's box art. This is quite simply the best emulator on iOS, providing you have an iPad…

In a nutshell

It's not well suited to iPhone and the controls take a while to get used to, but this becomes an essential buy if you happen to own an iPad and iCade.

>> **Score 77%**

OPINION



This is a must-buy. Solid emulation, great presentation, iCade compatibility, the vast majority of the Vectrex back catalogue available from launch, and all at a snip of what they'd normally cost. It represents superb value for money.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Vectrex Regeneration

>> **The first homebrew games appeared in 1996 and included *Vector Vaders*, *All Good Things*, *Spike Hoppin'* and *Patriots*.**

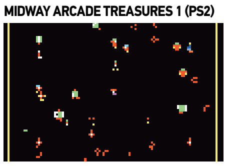
>> **Numerous peripherals were available for the machine, like a light pen and a 3D imager.**

>> **Rantmedia Games will be releasing more games, which will be free for those who bought the *Mega Pack*.**

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 1 (PS2)



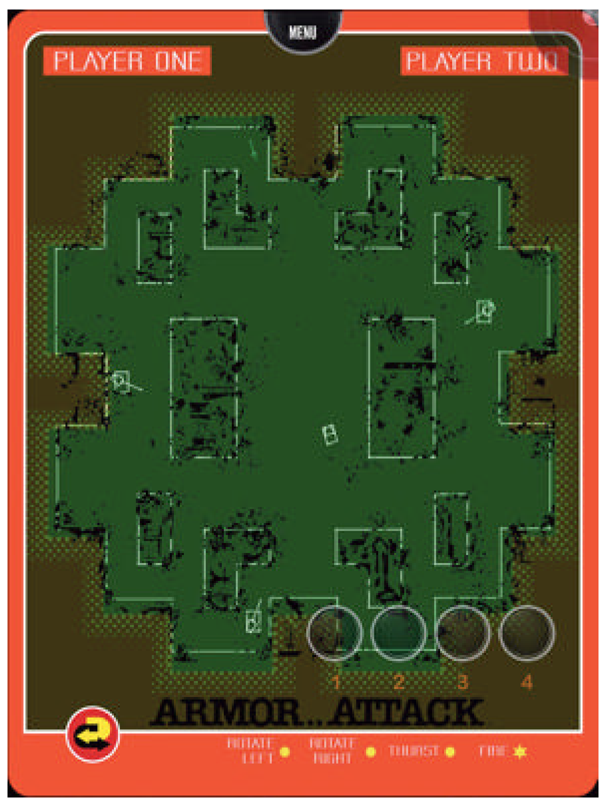
▼ SOMETHING NEW

SEGA MEGA DRIVE COLLECTION (PSP)





» [iOS] Presentation is superb, with achievements, leaderboards and the ability to challenge friends.

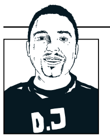


» [iOS] iCade owners should add an extra 15 percent to the score, it makes a huge difference using it.

Paper Mario: Sticker Star

MARIO GETS HIMSELF IN A STICKY SITUATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS » **PLAYERS:** 1



>> **You have to** hand it to Intelligent Systems. Rather than simply stick to the tried and tested formula that has worked for three previous *Paper Mario* games, the developer is trying something a little different for its latest instalment of the long-running series.

The levelling up of past games has been abandoned, the RPG-heavy story of past games has been lightened and there's a stronger emphasis on singular levels and exploration. It's an interesting bag that delivers decidedly mixed results. This is mainly down to the new sticker system, which at times is genius and at others is completely frustrating.

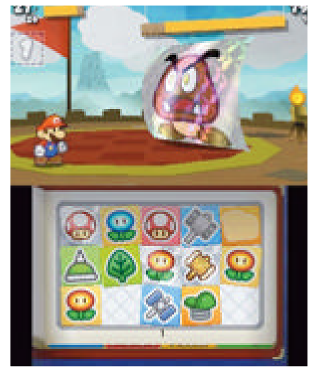
Combat, follows the same turn-based layout as before, but your attacks are now powered by the consumable stickers you collect. This can be an issue, as you'll occasionally find yourself ill-equipped to deal with current enemies (you only have a limited space in your book); this can be particularly frustrating when you need specific stickers to help you against the bigger bosses.

Another issue is the obscure puzzles that have been thrown into the mix. They require specific stickers, which are not only deviously hidden, but also make little sense once you've finally worked them out. As a result you'll often get frustratingly stumped, as you're unable to open new areas.

It's a shame that these irritating issues crop up so regularly, as this is an otherwise highly enjoyable adventure that looks lovely, is humorously scripted and uses 3D to great effect. A fine attempt at taking an established franchise into a new and interesting direction, and one that we thoroughly approve of.

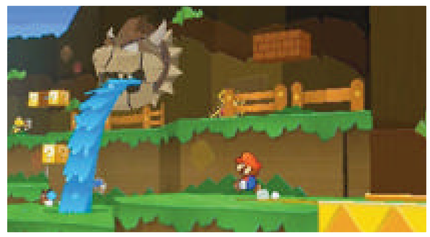
>> Score **72%**



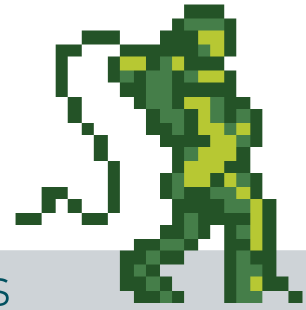


» [3DS] (Right) Boss battles are challenging, more so if you don't have certain useful stickers on you.

» [3DS] (Below) The 3D of *Paper Mario: Sticker Star* is actually impressive and inventive, giving a good sense of depth.



RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



INFORMATION
» **System:** Wii U
» **Buy it for:** £8.99
» **Buy it from:** Wii U eShop
» **Score:** 90%

Mighty Switch Force! Hyper Drive Edition

The bad news is that *Mighty Switch force! Hyper Drive Edition* isn't a brand new game, being an update of the 3DS version. The good news is that it's absolutely brilliant. Styled like a high-definition offshoot of *Gunstar Heroes*, *Mighty Switch Force!* places you in the run-and-gun shoes of Patricia Wagon, a cyborg police office who has to round up a set number of escaped convicts. Patricia has the ability to push and pull various blocks that are dotted around the stage, allowing her to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, and even kill enemies (or herself if she's not careful).

It's an exceedingly simple mechanic, but one that works exceptionally well thanks to the tightly designed stages that WayForward has created. Initially you'll be switching out blocks to cover gaps in the ground, but as the levels progress you'll have to start solving some fiendishly designed puzzles. Enemies become useful objects, designed to open timed doors, or break open otherwise impenetrable rocks, while the cleverly placed prisoners ensure you'll be doing plenty of exploring if you want to find the best route through each stage and hit its bonus par time. *Hyper Drive Edition* is short at only 16 stages, but WayForward have included an additional five new levels for this Wii U port and also included unlockable Hyper Editions of each stage, adding more depth to the overall game.

The visuals have also been overhauled with well-animated characters that move with all the fluidity of the best 16-bit sprite work. Add in responsive controls and the ability to simply play using the Gamepad and *Mighty Switch Force!* really does feel like a classic tribute to the 16-bit platformers of old. An excellent release that tests your brain and your reflexes.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Virtua Fighter 2

» **System:** Xbox 360
» **Buy it for:** 400 Points
» **Buy it from:** Xbox Live Arcade
» **Score:** 88%
» It may be looking its 19 years, but *Virtua Fighter 2* still has it where it matters. Its gameplay remains superb with a bewilderingly deep combat system that will take an age to learn if you want to master all the available fighters. *Virtua Fighter 2* is also excellent from a porting point of view with excellent emulation, two versions of the game (2.0 and 2.1) and marvellous network play.



Pid

» **System:** PC (tested) Xbox Live, PSN
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 to £6.99
» **Buy it from:** www.steampowered.com, www.gog.com, PSN, Xbox Live Arcade
» **Score:** 64%
» *Pid* tells the story of a young boy trapped on a mysterious world. He develops the ability to shoot beams of light from his hands, which he can then use to float on (for a limited time) or trap enemies. It's a clever mechanic, but is let down by floaty controls and infuriating difficulty spikes. A pity, as the game itself looks glorious, while the boss battles are genuinely delightful.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

» **System:** PS Vita
» **Buy it for:** £9.99
» **Buy it from:** www.steampowered.com
» **Score:** 90%
» After impressing us with its PS3 port, Just Add Water is back with another slick conversion. While the visuals are scaled down compared to the PS3 version, they still look glorious on the Vita's OLED screen. The controls have also been implemented well, with switching between perspectives being handled with a simple double tap of the screen, meaning you can enjoy one of Oddworld Inhabitants' most innovative games.



Castlevania: The Adventure

» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £2.70
» **Buy it from:** 3DS eShop
» **Score:** 40%
» Konami's first portable adventure wasn't the best on its release, and time has done nothing to change that opinion. Weedy visuals, stiff controls and some frustratingly precise jumps later on in the game are the biggest sticking points, while the slow pace, lack of sub weapons, ropey collision detection and overall shortness only add to the disappointment. A poor platformer that stains the *Castlevania* name.



The Walking Dead Season One

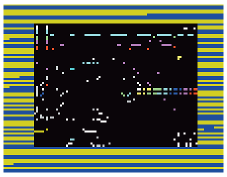
» **System:** PC (tested) PS3, Xbox 360, iOS » **Buy it for:** £20.99 » **Buy it from:** steampowered.com, PSN, Xbox Live Arcade, AppStore » **Score:** 92%

The Walking Dead may be based on a brand new IP, but it has the pulsating heart of a classic LucasArts adventure. No surprise when you realise that it's been created by Telltale, which comprises of ex-LucasArts staff. The crux of *The Walking Dead* revolves around protagonist Lee Everett who has been convicted for killing his wife and is heading for prison when the zombie apocalypse starts. He soon discovers a young girl and vows to protect her from the walking dead.

While *The Walking Dead* mixes a third-person perspective with a smattering of QTEs and occasional gameplay sequences, it's the choice-based narrative that propels it forward. Every decision and choice you make impacts tremendously on your actions and the characters you meet, delivering consequences that can be truly devastating as the story unfolds. Yes, it suffers from a glitchy engine and most of its gameplay is basic, but its character development, magnificent story telling and shocking brutality makes other adult games look absolutely laughable.



I was hoping that the festive period would be a good one for homebrew and it hasn't disappointed; the RGCD competition saw ten new games released, the MSXDev turnout looks interesting and at the time of writing the Spectrum Christmas rush hasn't happened but fingers crossed. And we've had an Avalanche of games from developer Revival Studios and I'll apologise in the same breath for that terrible "pun"



FORMAT: SPECTRUM
DEVELOPER: BOB SMITH
LINK: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/LUMASCII-SPEC
RELEASE: 2012
PRICE: £3.00 OR MORE DONATION (DOWNLOAD) OR £TBA (TAPE)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

A GAME WITH SOME CHARACTER(S)

LUMASCII

The multiverse is under attack and already there are several worlds which have been overrun by bizarre aquatic aliens, giant spiders, googly-eyed bats, spinning tetrominoes and other strange beasties. But fear not citizens of various realities – there is one woman out there who is brave enough to take on the challenge and she's equipped with a handy jet-propelled EVA suit and a laser blaster. Her name is Chi-Chi Rocket.

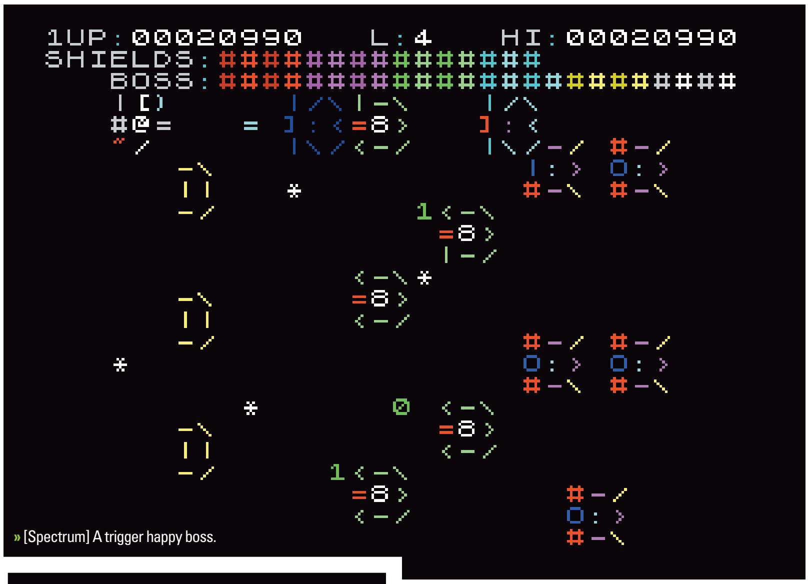
The suit itself is a marvel of modern technology, offering protection in just about every conceivable environment and a degree of shielding from impacts with enemies and their bullets – which is for the best since the locations she'll be battling through range from the depths of an ocean to the cold vacuum of space. There are plenty of creatures wanting to take Chi-Chi out of the picture as well, which is where the laser comes in and, although there aren't any upgrades available, with a little button mashing it's more than capable of taking care of business.

Bob Smith is starting to develop something of a track record when it comes to finding unusual ways to utilise the Spectrum's hardware in a game – as demonstrated by his 2008 shoot-'em-up *SplATTR* which used huge pixels moving at speed to remarkable effect – but we're beginning to suspect that he might have spent just a little too much time programming the ZX81 recently since everything in *LumASCII* is displayed as coloured ASCII characters! Smith himself has described it as looking like a game for a "mythical ZX82 machine which kept the character display of the ZX81 but added colour and sound" on his website.

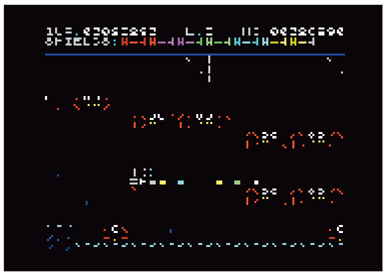
That means everything on screen is made from alphanumeric characters from Chi-Chi's assault suit or her assailants to the flowers, boxes of TNT, sandcastles and vines making up the environment. Both the sprite movement and scrolling happen in character steps – rather like the backgrounds in some of the classic MSX shooters such as *Gradius* – so most people will require a little acclimatisation before they start playing properly. And even after that *LumASCII* still takes some serious practise to truly master, partly because the use of that art style also results in something that feels distinct from other shoot-'em-ups on the Spectrum.

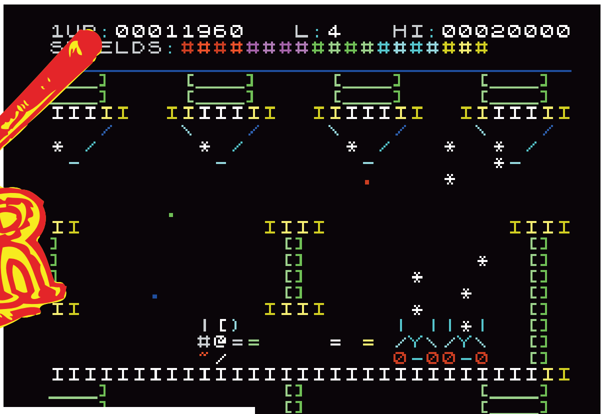
Once that initial hump is out of the way, having everything lined up on character cell rows and columns actually makes aiming or dodging shots easier than it would otherwise be, but that doesn't mean it's a walk in the park; there are some particularly evil sections where even fans of the genre will probably lose a life or two working out the best route to manoeuvre through the narrow gaps and twisting passages in the landscape or take down an end of level boss that appears to have got its ammo in bulk from the internet and is planning on using every last round. But it wouldn't be half as much fun if saving the universe were easy, right?

90%

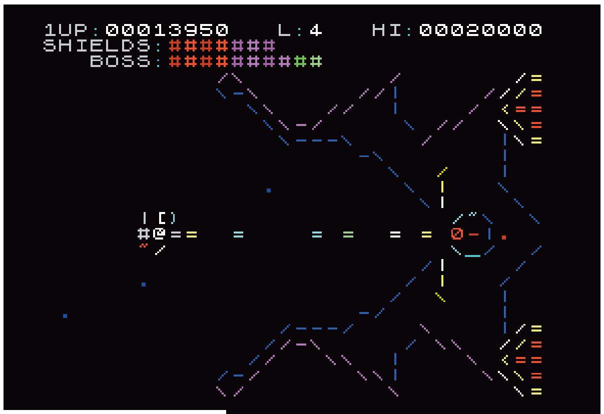


» [Spectrum] A trigger happy boss.





» [Spectrum] I want all the world to see.



» [Spectrum] Are you eyeballing me?

retro GAMER SIZZLER

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

CHRISTMAS CAROL VS THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** INTELLIVISION » **DEVELOPER:** JAMES PUJALS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/XMAS-CAROL-INTV
» **PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD OR $60 (CARTRIDGE) PLUS P&P

Carol Greenleaf is an elf, in fact she's one of Santa's most trusted helpers and just the person to recover lost Christmas presents stolen by the Evil Snowman. The presents are scattered around the Frozen Ice-Cube Caverns which are haunted by the Ghost Of Christmas Presents, a friendly enough spirit who is harmless but does insist on taking back any collected packages should he catch Carol. He's soon joined on each stage by the Evil Snowman however, whose touch is fatal.

Christmas Carol Vs The Ghost Of Christmas Presents is a single screen, maze-based collecting game that is just a little influenced by *Pac-Man* and, although it might sound easy with just one enemy chasing the heroine, the snowman's speed increases over time so collecting all the gifts is an urgent matter,making the gameplay fast-paced and fun. One point of note is the detailed animation, in particular the Evil Snowman and Carol's turning to dust after death during play. Lovely.

88%



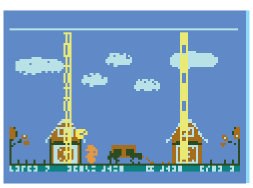
» [Intellivision] Race you to it.



MARY POPPINS

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** JAN JOHNSEN
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/POPPINS-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE



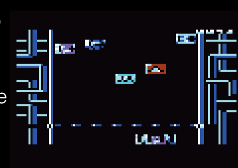
Mary Poppins' magical carpet bag has been half inched by a bird and left in mid air. Using her magical powers, she must commandeer an umbrella and fly up to collect it, avoiding the airborne nasties standing in her way. Mary's ascent can be controlled with the joystick, with left and right performing the obvious tasks, fire increasing her speed and down doing the reverse. Apart perhaps from the sound, this game could probably pass as a late Seventies release for design, difficulty level or graphics and, although the backgrounds are reasonable, the sprites are very primitive with Mary herself being entirely pink apart from yellow facial features, so she's either bald and naked or wearing a flesh-coloured onesie. Still, for players who aren't worried about visuals and like simple and relatively challenging gamplay, this is worth a try and we did have fun with it.

71%

AVALANCHE

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

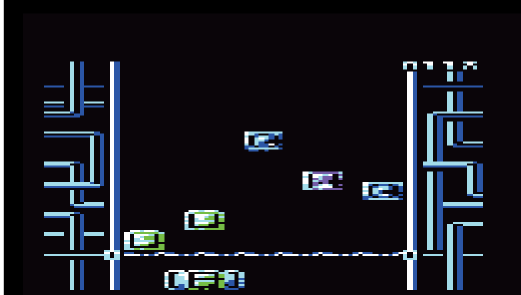
» **FORMAT:** UNEXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** REVIVAL STUDIOS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/AVALANCHE-VIC » **PRICE:** 3.99 EUROS (DOWNLOAD) OR 7.99 EUROS (TAPE)



Revival Studios' *Avalanche* is probably best described as an action puzzle game. Five tiles each with a unique shape and colour descend from the top of the screen and the player, using their launcher based at the bottom, has to keep them away from the bar just above it by firing missiles created from identical shapes up at them. There are five shapes in total and any block sent back to its starting position changes randomly into one of the possible states.

Left and right move the launcher between the descending shapes, up and down selects the tile on the launcher and fire does the obvious. The initial pace of the falling blocks is quite sedate but, as the game speeds up over time, managing to keep all of the tiles in the air soon becomes difficult. It's a no frills game like unexpanded VIC-20 titles of old and just like those classics from the Eighties we found it difficult to put down.

86%


» [VIC 20] So near but yet…

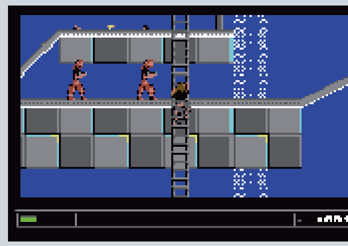
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [ZX 81] Spaceship… rocks… what happens next?

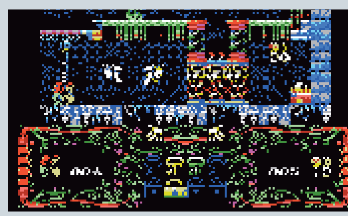
» A METEORIC RISE

Bob Smith's been a busy chap, straight after finishing the lovely *LumASCII* for the Spectrum, he's moved over to the ZX81 and, having decided that there wasn't a decent rendition of *Asteroids* for Sir Clive's black and white wonder, has sat down and produced one. The game is called *Impact*, www.kikstart.eu/impact-zx81 will take visitors to Smith's website. We're looking forward to seeing how it plays.


» [C64] Fancy meeting you here!

» SECRET AGENT MAN

Fans of the *Metal Warrior* series on the C64 – the youngest of which will be celebrating its tenth birthday in 2013 – should find *Hessian* interesting since it's being developed by *MW* coder Lasse Öörni and shares the same story-driven action/adventure style of gameplay. It can't really be described as playable yet but there's an early tech demo showing off the scrolling at the Covert Bitops website – www.covertbitops.c64.org


» [MSX] Who's a pretty Polly?

» PINING FOR THE FJORDS

Teodoro No Sabe Volar is an MSXDev 2012 competition entry from RetroWorks and Dimension Z, the developers of shoot-'em-up *Genesis: Dawn Of A New Day* and platformer JumpinG respectively. At the time of writing there isn't anything playable in the wild, but the released screenshots are extremely promising. www.kikstart.eu/teodoro-msx links to the Spanish-speaking forum where the announcement was made.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

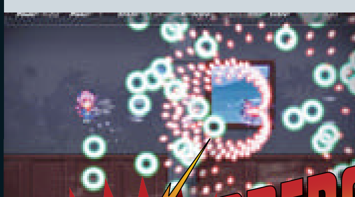
>> AND THERE GOES COULTHARD

The order of the day in the recently released *Racedrome City* is fast cars and… well, more fast cars as competitors take to closed off city street tracks. There are three play modes, mutliplayer options for local or online competition, lots of options to tinker with and ten tracks to race around, with the action being more arcade oriented than simulation. The single-player modes have a time rewind feature, allowing drivers to undo crashes or watch the more vigorous mid-race pile ups happen a second time. www.kikstart.eu/racedrome-xblig



>> CORGIS IN SPACESHIPS

Bullet hell shoot-'em-up fans might want to try *Aeternum* out at www.kikstart.eu/aeternum because it scrolls horizontally and isn't stingy with bullets. Apart from the actual blasting, the game doesn't take its own subject matter particularly seriously, so expect to lead magical demon girl Ellica into battle against hipsters and airborne squids while finding her friend Macy who may be kidnapped or just having lunch.



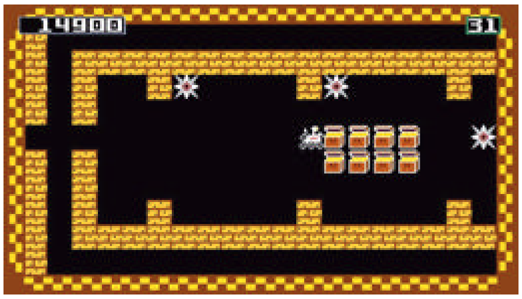
FLASH BOREDOM

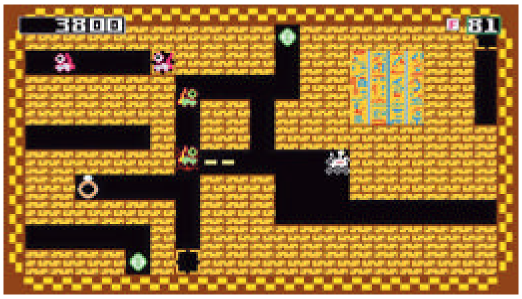


Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at Sole Gunner.

HERE'S SOME UNPRETENTIOUS MEGA DRIVE-STYLED RUN-AND-GUN ACTION, WITH WEAPON AND HEALTH POWER-UPS TO COLLECT, LARGE BOSSES TO BATTLE, LOTS OF DEVIOUSLY-PLACED ENEMIES, A DIFFERENT LOOK FOR EACH OF THE SCROLLING STAGES AND AN AUTHENTICALLY STEEP DIFFICULTY CURVE. IT PLAYS REALLY WELL WITH A JOYPAD AND JOY TO KEY. WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SOLE-GUNNER-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…





SPACE EGYPT

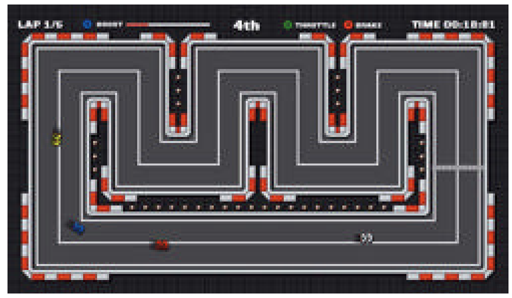
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SPACE-EGYPT-XBLIG

In the near future, NASA's budget has been severely cut. The boffins decide that, in order to finance the second Curiosity Rover mission, they'll need to send it into the ancient Martian pyramids in search of valuable treasure; from a scientific perspective this actually works out better than expected because their choice of location houses more than just the faint signs of previous life discovered on the Red Planet.

Curiosity 2 carries a laser that would normally be involved in procuring rock samples which can be used for self defence and a flash bomb which flattens everything on screen and prevents new enemies spawning for a small period of time, but to progress through each stage the rover needs to collect keys for doorways leading further into the pyramid and each stage must be completed within a strict time limit.

It does have a silly name – although that's probably to be expected, the developer's called We Love Hamsters – and the scenario is reasonably bonkers as well, but *Space Egypt* is a fun if somewhat flawed game; the biggest problem is getting stuck at the end of a vertical corridor and not getting a gap in the stream of spawned nasties. For that reason we're going to recommend giving Curiosity 2 a test drive before buying.





RETRO PIXEL RACERS

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/RP-RACERS-XBLIG

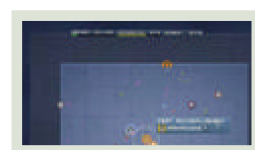
Retro Pixel Racers is a top down, single-screen racing game which owes a debt to classic coin-op *Super Sprint*. There are fourteen tracks to unlock, with the major challenges being to keep the car within the barriers and away from computer-controlled drivers; the latter are tricky to deal with because they know exactly where they want to go and cut up or rear end the player to get there, losing no speed to the impact, which can obviously get rather frustrating at times.

The car can be upgraded in the shop between races and, for those moments where some extra horsepower would come in useful, there's also the boost which charges up during play. Unlocking all the stages is an uphill battle but it doesn't have to be attempted in one sitting.

ROBOT LEGIONS

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/ROBOT-LEGIONS-XBLIG

It wouldn't be XBLIG if there wasn't a new twin stick shooter available, but *Robot Legions* isn't a common or garden twitch-based shooter; instead it has a more methodical pace, with coins collected from destroyed enemies being used between levels to purchase power-ups. Some of these extras are for the player's armour or firepower but there's also the cash magnet which attracts coins towards the player to improve and a multiplier that increases the value of any collected dosh. The mission itself isn't massive and there isn't a lives counter to worry about so stages can be attempted repeatedly, but destroying the nasties is still satisfying and there's some replay value in finding ways to optimise the process of tooling up for the final battle.





HOMEBREW HEROES



AFTER PRODUCING EFMB AND LOST TAPES OF ALBION, DAVID HUGHES SURPRISED US BY GOING BACK TO BASICS WITH THE SINGLE-SCREEN ACTION GAME MOLE RAT, WHICH WAS REVIEWED IN ISSUE 109. THIS WAS SOMETHING WE FELT NEEDED FURTHER INVESTIGATION…

Q&A

After your previous games, *Mole Rat* is something of a departure, why did you go for such a simple design?
I had too many overambitious ideas at once. At the time I was flitting between an epic multi-screen game, fast scrolling shooter, strategy and even a single player beat-'em-up. The first two were probably more programming exercises than good ideas for a game though. Quite predictably I didn't get far on any of them, and once you've taken a break from one project it can be hard to get back into. I remember one horrible day spent bug fixing during my staycation, and thinking "This is supposed to be a fun hobby!" In order to get something finished and keep it fun, I decided to go back to basics: single screen, simple block map and manageable engine.

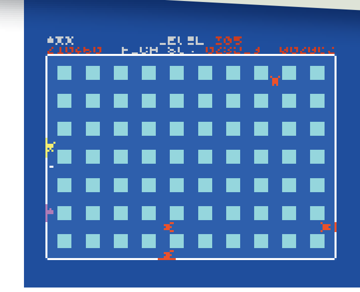
And you've mentioned on World of Spectrum that the games *Attack Force*, *Targ* and *Crossfire* were an inspiration, how much so?
Very much so, in fact the original plan was to do a pure *Targ* remake for the Spectrum, but this wasn't possible in the end. I'm very fond of games with an early Eighties look so I took inspiration from this and other similar games. It was actually very nearly called *Death Frog*, with the main sprite coloured green, but I decided there are quite enough frog-based heroes. Add a splash of magenta and Mole Rat was born.

Were there any particularly good or bad moments during development?
It mostly went very smoothly. The AI was a pain because the code got very messy to the point that I felt I was hacking someone else's code rather than writing my own. It works well on the screen though, which is the main thing. Including Shiru's excellent 'Oh yeah!' sound sample was a treat; it's impressive to hear how sweet the Spectrum beeper can sound.

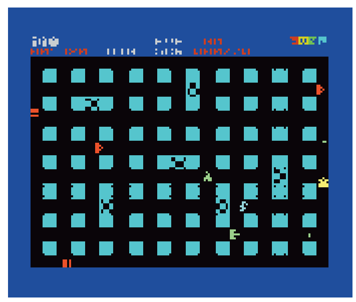
The difficulty curve is pretty harsh, do you feel this scares off or galvanises players?
Depends on the player and the type of game. When *Mole Rat* was released I had comments from people who couldn't get off the first screen to people who made level five on their first go. I would agree though that my games lean towards cruelty, I'm generous too, though: I make them fairly short with treats along the way.

You've since released *Shuttlebug*, which looks a little similar, should it be considered an upgrade to *Mole Rat* or a sequel?
I'll go with upgrade. *Mole Rat* is a very pure form of gameplay – devising tactics and never erring, *Shuttlebug* still has that but is more forgiving. I reduced the inertia, increased the fire rate and gave more life bonuses. It also has more variety and an advanced end of game animation.

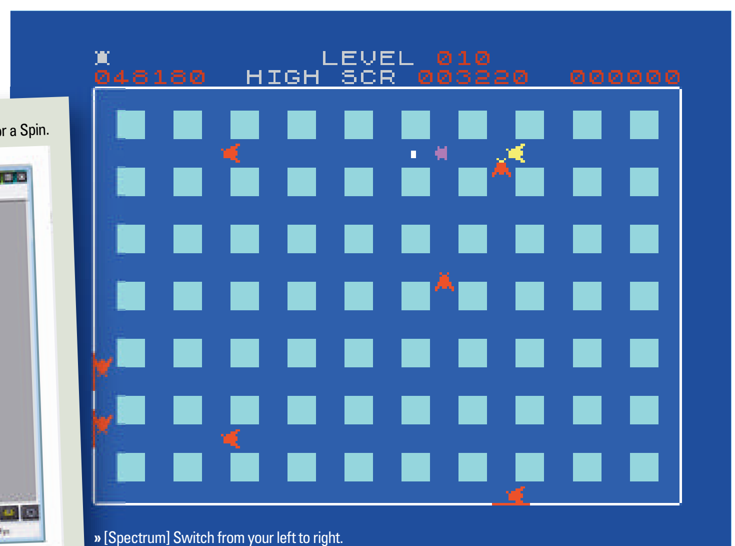
And finally, what do you think will be your next project? Something along the same lines as *Mole Rat* or something different?
I prefer to keep my powder dry but there is a management/strategy game I would love to finish. The trouble is that a large amount of planning is required before I do a single keystroke, so there's every chance it'll end up a *Pac-Man* clone!



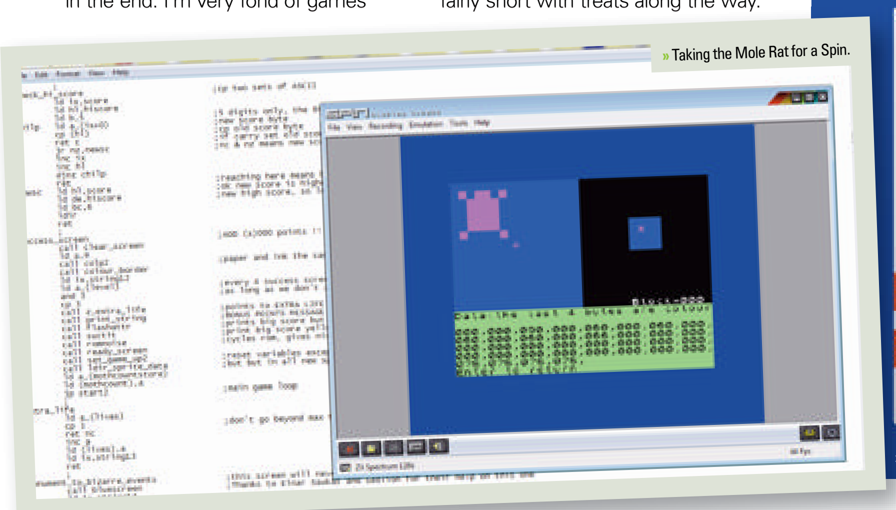
» [Spectrum] Bonus points please!



» [Spectrum] *Shuttlebug*, the game that came next.



» [Spectrum] Switch from your left to right.



» Taking the Mole Rat for a Spin.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Mega Drive game?

XFile2708
So many to choose from with over 500 released on PAL format alone – but if I had to narrow it down to just one it'd be *Streets Of Rage 2*. Superb gameplay, fantastic soundtrack, great single-player and even more fun with a friend playing through multiplayer.

themightymartin
I've always had a soft spot for *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for its brilliant bonus stages, but the excellent platform/blasting action of *Vectorman* pips *Sonic 2* to the post.

Hiro
I had an Amiga at the time, so I was lucky I had a much better machine. The Mega Drive game I've played the most is *OutRun 2019*, fast enjoyable racer, forking roads, etc… Very good for a quick play.

batman877
Whilst I was tempted to go with *Sonic 2*, I think *Strider* wins it for me. Released in 1990, it was one of the first games for the Mega Drive and the fact Sega managed to convert this quality arcade title to such perfection on a home console was a true achievement. Thankfully I had the Japanese version at the time, so didn't have to put up with the awful artwork on the European one!

Gitman_HalStep
Ooooh tough one. Personally, it's neck and neck between *Sonic 2* and *Road Rash 2*. I'd be happy enough being stuck on a desert island with only one of these, with a console, a TV and the means to power it all obviously.

mqark
Has to be *Gynoug* for me!

fredghostmaster
I always loved *Aladdin*, super gameplay added to great graphics and sound made it a cut above other platformers.

thl
The Revenge Of Shinobi. This has to be my favourite Mega Drive game and I loved every moment of it – unique ninja skills, great level designs, incredible back ground music and some rather odd boss battles that included the likes of Spider-Man, Batman and Godzilla.

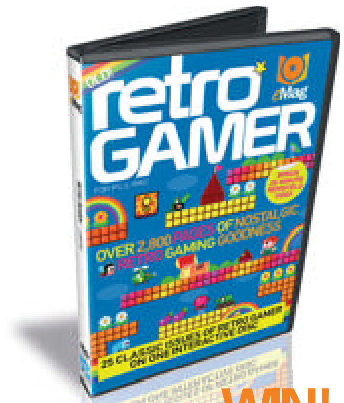
Combo-Breaker
Streets Of Rage 2. What a game!

Mire Mare
Sonic The Hedgehog 2. This is to me the best *Sonic* game ever and, ironically, a game that wasn't even made by Sonic Team.

junkmale
The Mega Drive was my first introduction to gaming of any sort. It's still my favourite console. For me: *The Legend Of Galahad*. First game I ever bought and first game I ever completed.

Timothy Lumsden
Rocket Knight Adventures – the game just clicks with me – love the look of it too.

Smurph
Easy peasy – *Thunder Force IV*, my favourite game of all time, never mind just the Mega Drive.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

STAR LETTER

THE FORGOTTEN ONES

Dear Retro Gamer,
Now that it's the start of a new year, how about giving some more coverage to lesser-known systems? While I'm perfectly happy with the coverage that appears in **Retro Gamer**, it often feels a little 'safe' as if you want to appeal to the widest crowd possible. Where are the regular articles on the Atari 8-bit range, the Commodore Pet, Exidy Sorcerer or TRS-80? Why haven't you done detailed articles on the Toshiba T100, Jupiter Ace or Coleco Adam? There's a wealth of weird and wonderful systems out there that you've barely scratched the surface of, and I'd love it if you could reveal more about these obscure machines. I really enjoyed the four-page piece on the PC Engine, but since then there haven't been any more.
Jacob Bellamy

Thanks for the letter, Jacob. Aside from emulation issues (to get screenshots) the biggest hurdle is finding someone with a sufficient knowledge, and getting our hands on the rarer machines. We'll keep this request in mind, though.





XBOX LIVE REVIVAL

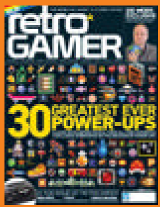
Happy New Year, Retro Gamer!
It's 2013 and we know what that means, your unofficial retro rule means that you can now cover games from 2003! As such I would like to request a feature on the first Xbox live games. I think Xbox Live was available in March 2003 (the Internet seems to think November 2002, but I'm sure that was US only) and I have fond memories of the first batch of Live games, even more so now that we can't play them online anymore. My favourite was *Rainbow Six 3* where I met some good people (call signs- Mav, Dark and Live) in the first ever co-op match I joined who I then played with most nights on that game for about a year and I am still friends with today. I also loved *Unreal Championship*, *Mech Assault* and the free *Wacked!* demo.

So please can we have a 2003 Xbox Live games round up? It felt like a special time when everyone who had it knew that something special was happening, even if only a handful of games seemed to support it, you couldn't voice chat over loading screens and it was hard as nails to actually get a game going with the friends you wanted (until *Halo 2* with 'matchmaking' came along, but you can't cover that yet).
David (or 'Snow' to my *Rainbow Six* buddies)

Has it really been ten years already? Seems like only yesterday. That's actually quite a good call David. We had a lot of fond memories of playing many of the games you mentioned (particularly *Rainbow Six 3*) so it would be interesting to revisit some of the best games. The only real downside is that they're no longer playable on the service, but we're sure we could work something out.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag



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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

GAMECUBE REQUEST

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'm a huge fan of the GameCube and would love to see more coverage of it in the magazine. It's over 11 years old now, so is surely fair coverage for **Retro Gamer**? It may not have been the success that Nintendo wanted and the lack of a *Mario* launch game hurt it greatly, but I loved it regardless and was horribly addicted to *Super Monkey Ball, Luigi's Mansion* and *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*. It would be fantastic if you could do an in-depth look at the machine's history and get an interview with its creators. I'd love to know why they decided to make it look like a toy.

Mark Catterall

We do put the odd bit of GameCube coverage in the mag, Mark, but we feel it's a little too early to go in-depth on the console. Nintendo are also rather closed when it comes to discussing older systems, so it'd be hard to get the answers you'd like to hear.





» [PC] We'd love to cover *Little Big Adventure*, but as with many topics, it all depend s on finding resources.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Lore

This month we've been discussing the Kickstarter project *Lore*, which is either completely terrible or potentially the greatest game ever made. Based on all the negative feedback we're guessing it's the latter, but there's no denying the scope of the developer's ambition, even if he couldn't spell his way out of a paper bag.

MORE WIL, PLEASE

Dear Retro Gamer,

Just wanted to say I loved the Wil Overton Nintendo cover on your Christmas issue. It looked absolutely beautiful and reminded me of the classic days of *Super Play*. I didn't even mind that there was no snow!

Paul Temple

LESS WIL, PLEASE



Dear Retro Gamer,

I was very disappointed with your Christmas issue last year. The Wil Overton cover had no connection with Christmas at all, making it a poor replacement for the Oliver Frey art that you normally use. Please don't do this again.

Michael Masterson

The cover for the Christmas issue caused quite a bit of controversy, but we've seen letters and posts from just as many people who didn't like it, as those who did. It just shows that you're never going to please everybody. We obviously loved it, but maybe we'll make this December issue a little more Christmas themed.

TWINSEN'S ODDYSEE

Dear Retro Gamer,

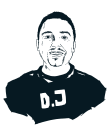
I'm a huge fun of *Little Big Adventure*, and was really hoping that my favourite magazine could cover it in any shape of form. When it first came out on the PC in 1994 I remember being overcome by its visuals, characters and clever design. If you could get an interview with the creators, or do some sort of retrospective (it's 19 years old this year) I'd be forever grateful.

Harry James

We'll get our investigative hats on, Harry, and see if we can track anybody down.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

This issue's covers that nearly happened



DARRAN

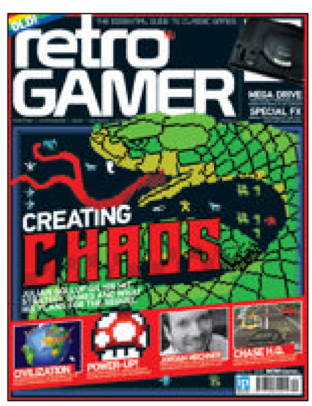
We loved the simplicity of this cover and also tried a couple where Sid is holding the world in his hands (there was a cool Atlus pose as well). No matter what we tried we just couldn't get it to work, although a smaller posed image of Sid did make the final cover.



STUART

Julian Gollop's *Chaos* is a fantastic strategy game and we had some amazing coverage on it. As good as the game is however, we felt it's not quite as recognisable as *Laser Squad* (which also boasted superb art). You always have to be wary of your international market and this didn't feel like the right fit.





retro GAMER

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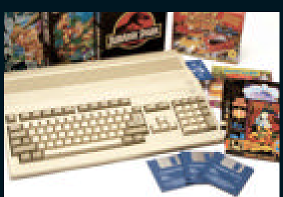
ON SALE | MARCH 2013



BOSS RUSH!

We celebrate the greatest boss encounters of all time. How many will you have defeated?

Also inside

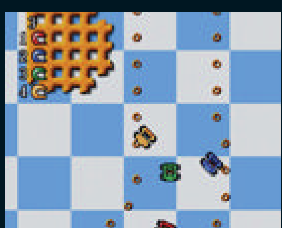


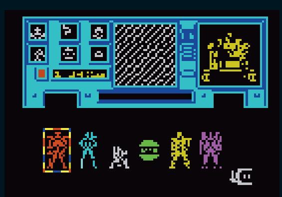
Amiga 500

■ Our latest collector's guide focuses on Commodore's 16-bit computer. Discover the games and peripherals that every collector should have

Micro Machines

■ Codemasters' David Darling and *Micro Machines*' designer Andrew Graham look back at every game in the popular franchise



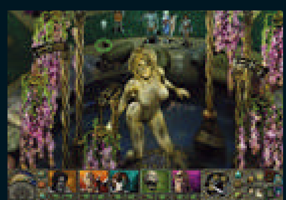


Shadowfire Trilogy

■ Martyn Carroll speaks to John Heap about *Shadowfire* and *Enigma Force* and reveals what happened to the final instalment

Planescape: Torment

■ Designer Chris Avellone reveals how he turned a quirky *Dungeons & Dragons* licence into one of the best RPGs of all time



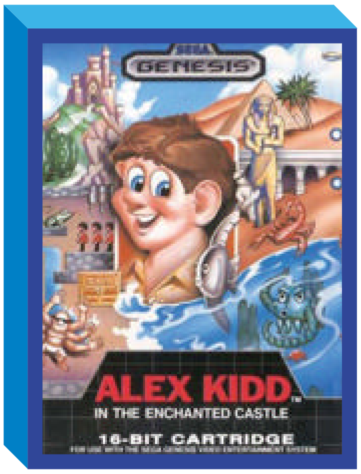


Conversion Kings

■ Classic developers speak to us about how they were able to port the arcade smashes of yesteryear to humble 8 and 16-bit computers

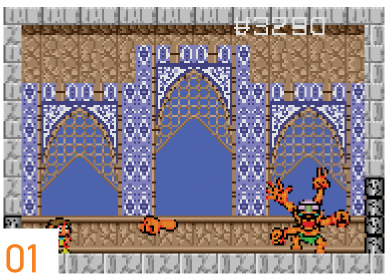

HITMAN ABSOLUTION
Images used from 2012 shows.
Image credits: Martin Walter & Juliette Crawford
2013 SHOWS
16th Feb Midlands - TIC Telford
16th - 17th March Birmingham - NEC
24th - 26th May London - ExCeL
20th July Manchester - Manchester Central
31st August Glasgow - SECC
25th - 27th October London - ExCeL
23rd - 24th Nov Birmingham - NEC
MCM COMIC CON
KIDS GO FREE*
Games - Movies - Comics
Sci Fi - Fantasy - Anime
Cosplay - Manga - Steampunk
BUY TICKETS ONLINE
WWW.MCMCOMICCON.COM
follow us @ mcmexpo
KIDS 10 and under GO FREE* Children (10 years & under) gain 'FREE GENERAL ENTRY' if accompanied by a full paying adult (restricted to 2 children per full paying adult). Images used herein for publicity purposes only.

ENDGAME



ALEX KIDD IN THE ENCHANTED CASTLE

» Alex Kidd's jump from 8 to 16-bit worlds was possibly the most disastrous jump he ever made. If you fancy wasting a year of your life then show a non-gamer Miracle Land in action, then show them Sonic The Hedgehog and then use that year to try to convince them the games are from the same developer. You'll never succeed. Anyway, here's the ending.



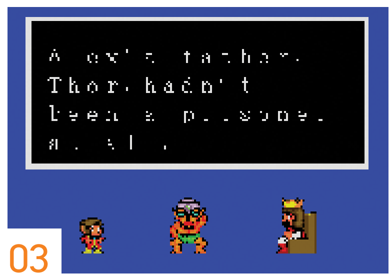
01

» On the search for his dad Thor, Alex finally tracks him to the world of Planet Paperock, a colourful place where everyone is way too obsessed with Rock Paper Scissors. He finally comes face to face with his father's captor.



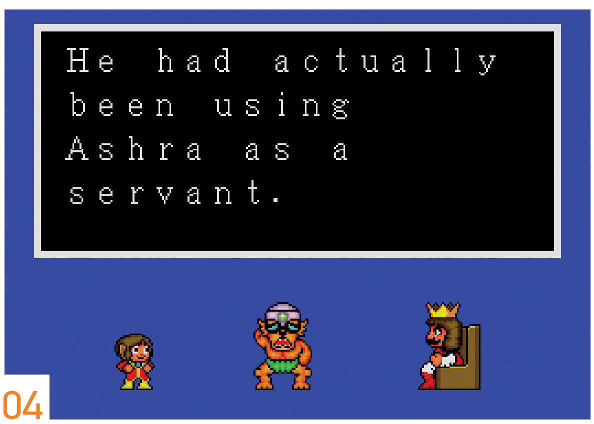
02

» After some epic fisti-paperi-scissori-cuffs, Alex walks away the victor and is delighted to be reunited with his dad. Kidd senior doesn't look all that kidnapped though, and has been watching the entire fight from a comfy throne.



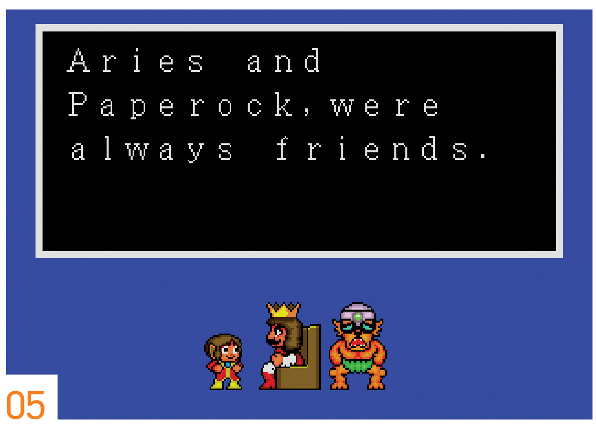
03

» What?!... It turns out Alex's dad wasn't kidnapped at all. It was all an act of attention-seeking nonsense. One that put the life of his son in jeopardy and could have potentially caused a war between two worlds.



04

» It gets worse, King Kidd has been using the guy you've just beaten up as a servant, bossing him around and making him wash his regal feet with expensive bottled water and deliver and collect his clothes from the dry cleaners.



05

» Alex went back to his home planet of Aries and explained the whole situation. "My dad's an asshole," he said, "he well and truly punked me. I am so embarrassed that I will stand down as Sega's mascot, and let someone else lead its great people."



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